

An ethnographic study into the  
construction of masculinity of 10-11  
year old boys in three junior schools

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the construction of masculinity of 10-11 year old boys at school. It is a comparative ethnographic study set in three junior schools differentiated by the social characteristics of their intake. The two main sources of data come from participant observation and interviews with children. The thesis draws on social constructionist and feminist-inspired theories and argues that the boys construct, negotiate and perform a range of different masculinities which are contingent on the meanings and practices found within each school. It is argued that there is a hierarchy of masculinities, of which one can be identified as dominant within each setting. Whilst, in each school, some masculinities are subordinated, the study found that not all boys aspire to, or compete with, the dominant form of masculinity and the version of the 'idealised' boy this presents. Some boys appear content to pursue their own forms of masculine identity. The boys' peer group is a powerful influence on the formation of masculinity. The study investigates the various strategies and symbolic resources that the boys are able to draw on to gain status and to classify and position themselves both within their own peer groups and in relation to the official culture in each school. The part played by the body is a dominant theme in the analysis presented and many forms of masculinity are seen as being defined through embodied practices. The most esteemed and extensively used resource across all three schools is physicality/athleticism exemplified by demonstrations of strength, power, fitness, skill and speed. While the official practices of the school attempt to regulate and control the boys' bodies to render them docile and receptive, the boys were, at times, active and demonstrated agency in resisting these attempts. The majority of boys form a pragmatic accommodation with the school regime and work hard for instrumental reasons, for instance to pass examinations that they see as leading to improved career opportunities and material remuneration.

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## Key to transcripts

[ <i>text</i> ]	Background information;
[...]	extracts edited out of transcript for sake of clarity;
...	pause;
/	moment when interruption begins;
<u>Fieldnotes</u>	data from field diary.

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## **Chapter 1      Introduction**

### ***1.1 The research problem***

This thesis is an in-depth empirical investigation into the social world of boys aged 10-11 at school and explores how young boys construct their masculine identities within their own pupil culture. The study considers what it means to be a boy in three different school settings differentiated by the social characteristics of their intake, and it is within this context that I have the following research question:

**how do boys construct their masculinities in a junior school setting?**

In order to answer this question it was necessary to investigate two sub-questions:

- (a) what symbolic resources are available, and which strategies do the boys use to gain status, and to classify and position themselves in relation to each other?, and;
- (b) in what ways do official school culture and practices contribute to the formation of boys' masculine identities?

### ***1.2 The origins of the study***

The thesis has its origins in two inter-related areas: academic interest in theories of masculinity (see, for example, Connell, 1987, 1995, 1996, 2000; Askew and Ross, 1989; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Francis, 1998, 2000; Connolly, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998;

Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Skelton, 2001); and, media/government concerns and discourses on ‘boys’ underachievement’ dating back to the mid 1990s. Research into masculinities and schooling has its origins in ‘men’s studies’ and the development of more sophisticated theories of gender which highlighted the inadequacies of ‘socialisation’ and ‘sex-role’ theories. Within the last ten years or so the study of masculinity has become a rapidly growing field and the basic proposition of much recent feminist and feminist-inspired work is that masculinity is socially constructed, not biologically given. Moreover, many writers have begun to talk about masculinities to show that there are multiple ways of being male which produce a series of diverse patterns and outcomes (Skelton, 2001). This thesis aims to contribute to the growing theoretical understanding of the construction of pre-adolescent masculine identities; how they are constituted in the context of peer group cultures; and how school processes work to produce particular ways of being male. In doing so, the intention is not to produce a new totalising theory of masculinity, but to build on, and add to, existing work in this field.

### *1.2.1 A personal journey*

The writing-up of this thesis over the past 3-4 years has been a constituent part of my own biography with all of its social, psychic and emotional investments. In some ways it has been like ‘an enacted drama of selfhood’ (Erben, 1996:159). Although it concerns the emerging identities of young boys at school, it is also about the enduring struggles for meaning and ongoing negotiations within my own shifting masculine identity, and includes ways that I have learnt how to *do* ethnography and how to become and present myself as an academic researcher.

The majority of my working life has been spent as a junior school teacher: I began teaching in 1979 and resigned from my post as deputy headteacher in 1997. Although I originally found teaching genuinely creative and stimulating, disenchantment had already begun to set in by the early 1990s. This coincided with the full implementation of the National Curriculum, which I found increasingly prescriptive, the arrival of a new headteacher at the school which resulted in a personality clash, and my increasing workload as deputy headteacher which often meant working weeks of 60 hours plus.

From 1992-95 I undertook an MA at the London Institute of Education which I found an enjoyable and intellectually challenging experience (my dissertation was on bullying in the junior school). I had caught the bug of research and wanted to do more. My knowledge and interest in education meant that the focus of my thesis was likely to be connected to, and set within, the field of primary education. During my time as a teacher I had plenty of first hand experience of working with boys and girls who appeared to enjoy school and who worked diligently to produce work of high quality; however there were also a number of boys who seemed to be more interested in playing football and showing off in front of their peers. I first became aware of the initial media and government interest, and anxiety, in 'boys' underachievement' from around 1994. I remember watching 'The Future is Female' (*Panorama*, BBC 1, 1994) and 'Men aren't Working' (*Panorama*, BBC 1, 1995), and I came across a number of articles in newspapers such as *The Guardian* and the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES). I cannot remember the topic making much of an impact in everyday staffroom conversation, but this is one of the problems with trying to recover fragments of memory, and any attempt at objectivity, especially about oneself, is always likely to be a highly

risky enterprise. Nevertheless, the discourse of ‘boys’ underachievement’ gave an initial impetus to my research interest in the topic of gender (and in particular, masculinity), and provides a context for this study.

### ***1.3 The discourse of ‘boys’ underachievement’***

The origins of the high profile given in the British media [1] to the discourse of boys’ underachievement lie in the repercussions from the 1988 Educational Reform Act (Skelton, 2001) [2]. This has situated schools in a competitive market place and within the panoptic gaze of performance indicators such as OFSTED reports and published league tables. These attempt to make public the academic outcomes of schooling, and by focusing on examination results (GCSEs, A Levels and SATs), a gender gap soon became apparent. It was not until around 1994 that the media appeared to notice that the achievements of English girls at GCSE and A Level had equalled or overtaken those of boys [3]. This seemed to produce something akin to a ‘moral panic’ (Epstein et al., 1998). Instead of acclaiming girls, their teachers and/or their schools, all three were castigated and schools and teachers accused of betraying boys (Delamont, 2000). The situation was neatly summed up by a letter to *The Guardian* (18.8.00):

Isn’t it interesting? When boys were outperforming girls in exams it was because boys were cleverer. Now that girls are outperforming boys, it is because boys are underperforming (Debbie Burton).

In June 1994, two *Sunday Times* journalists wrote about boys’ underachievement, observing that, ‘the gap is so wide that girls are now almost twice as likely to get an A grade at GCSE in English as boys’ (cited in Pickering, 1996:6). Over the next few



months, and then succeeding years, there followed a panoply of press headlines such as ‘Girls Trounce the Boys in Examination League Table’ (*The Times*, 3.9.94), ‘The Perils of Ignoring Our Lost Boys’ (*TES*, 28.6.96), and ‘Failing Boys “Public Burden Number One” ’ (*TES*, 27.11.98). These public concerns were also partly provoked and supported by the Government’s own statistics (OFSTED 1993; EOC and OFSTED 1996) and ministerial pronouncements which sought to establish a causal relationship between academic achievement and male anti-school cultures. The term ‘laddish’ was used by the, then, Schools Standards Minister, Stephen Byers in a speech at the Orwellian-sounding 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference for School Effectiveness and Improvement, and he further argued in *The Guardian* (1998) [4] that boys achievement was being held back by ‘laddish’ anti-school attitudes and behaviours. In 1998 the Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, wrote that the underachievement of boys was one of the most disturbing problems confronting the education system (*TES*, 1998) [5].

The boys’ underachievement literature (see, for example, Bradford, 1997; Bleach, 1998) is full of different understandings and proposed causes of this phenomenon. However, Francis (2000) argues that the two principal explanations that have been advanced for boys’ failure to match girls in terms of academic performance concern the boys and their schools, and the schoolboys’ own cultures [6]. The first of these perspectives comes from a combination of the *Pity The ‘Poor Boys’* and the *Failing Schools, Failing Boys* discourses identified by Epstein et al. (1998:6-7) in which boys are presented as victims in female-dominated schooling and girls’ improvements are seen as having come at the expense of boys. The government has also placed the responsibility for educational standards on schools, with their methods of learning, assessment and examination practices, and on the teachers, who are blamed for failing to make the educational process

sufficiently appealing [7]. The second explanation reassigns the blame to the boys and their schoolboy cultures of macho forms of masculinity and ‘laddism’ (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Younger et al., 1999). This recognises the power of the peer group in which boys who work hard and aspire to gain academic success are ridiculed and constructed as non-masculine and effeminate.

Of course the sociology of education shows that macho forms of behaviour have been a concern for a long time and that laddish constructions of masculinity are prevalent amongst white working class boys (see, for example, Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979; Walker, 1988; Abraham, 1995) [8] [9]. Sewell (1997) also details Afro-Caribbean boys’ rejection of schooling. Cohen (1998) has traced evidence of boys’ inferior achievement from a historical perspective back to the seventeenth century and argues that a number of fictions have been created about boys’ potential, and that their long-running underachievement has been protected from scrutiny. The first systematic public comparison of boys’ and girls’ performance was made in 1868, when the Schools’ Inquiry Commission noted that girls were more eager to learn than boys and reported that girls consistently outperformed them. Epstein et al. (1998) have also reminded us that the 11-plus examination was skewed and boys needed to gain lower marks than girls to pass, supposedly because girls were felt to mature earlier and thus perform better than boys. So although it would seem that boys are now underachieving in terms of academic performance in relation to girls, it could be argued that girls have always generally worked harder and performed better at school than boys overall, particularly at the junior school phase, and particularly in languages. Boaler (1997, 1998) makes the point that the National Curriculum and the GCSE examination have created a more equitable system with the result that girls have been given the *chance* to be seen to achieve more than boys

through their greater motivation and desire to learn. In other words, girls are being *allowed to achieve*, and are now finally overturning a history of male *overachievement*, often perpetuated at the expense of girls.

The discourse of boys' underachievement has been characterised by a series of, arguably, deliberate misrepresentations and confusions, exemplified by the way that public concern with the 'problem' of gender and achievement tends to look at boys as a homogeneous group rather than at which boys in particular are seen to be underachieving (Younger et al., 1999; Skelton, 2001). A summary of some of the main points are listed below:

\* The media try to polarise underachievement into a pro-girl versus pro-boy (or pro-feminist versus anti-feminist) issue (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998), but rather than all boys underachieving in relation to girls, it is *some* boys and *some* girls that are underperforming in *some* examinations. Although the debate has been centred around statistical differences, these have often been exaggerated, misinterpreted and over simplified (as argued by, for example, Epstein et al., 1998; Skelton, 1998, 2001; Weiner et al., 1998; Gorard et al., 1999; Francis, 2000) [10]. Although in general terms, girls' academic results have outpaced and surpassed those of boys, the results of both male and female pupils have continued to improve. Moreover, not all girls are achieving and many boys continue to excel at GCSE and A level. The achievement gaps that exist in the primary school are only noticeable in English and these are diminishing year by year (Gorard et al., 1999).

\* Equity issues are, again, not simply boys versus girls but are about particular groups of pupils (see, for example, Gilborn and Gipps, 1996; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). For

example, while boys from some ethnic minority groups are underachieving (Black Caribbean, Pakistani boys, and Chinese boys to a lesser extent) others are performing relatively well (Asian Indian boys). There are also ethnic minority groups where both boys and girls are underachieving, such as Bangladeshi pupils.

\* A number of writers (see, for example, Griffen, 1998; Regan, 1998; Epstein et al., 1998) point out that the gender differences in achievement are actually relatively negligible and suggest that the discourse of boys' underachievement has been engineered to deflect attention away from the far more significant differences in academic performance related to ethnicity and, particularly, social class and its connections to poverty (Teese et al., 1995; Arnot et al., 1999). It not surprising that further differences occur when social class, gender and ethnicity are interconnected (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000), and it is conspicuous that these wider issues have been generally ignored by the media and policy-makers in recent years (Davies, 2000; Francis, 2000).

\* If schools do disadvantage boys, this is not reflected in higher education and the workplace (Raphael Reed, 1999). As Treneman (cited in Warrington and Younger, 2000) points out, 'the statistical under-achievement of boys in schools is nothing compared to the statistical over-achievement of men in life'. Equal numbers of men and women go to university and the average wage/salary of a man is higher than that of a woman [11]. Although things may be improving, top jobs continue to go to men and many women work in insecure part-time jobs (Arnot et al., 1999; Warrington and Younger, 2000).

For the purposes of this study, the issue is not so much that of boys' underachievement but the interaction of gender, social class and schooling, and the opportunities to work well and achieve academically that this produces. The government's linking of masculine identities and school performance is important: however, these statements render schools neutral as influences on the development of gender identities, whereas, in contrast, recent research on gender and education shows schools as playing a leading role in the production of gendered, and other, identities (see, for example, Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell, 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Skelton, 2001).

Although the school has been recognised as a key site in the formation of masculinities, many of the main debates have concerned boys in secondary schooling [12], and as comparatively little work has been carried out in the *junior* school (containing children aged 7-11), there seemed an obvious space for my research which began in 1997 [13]. Exceptions to this preoccupation with the secondary school comes from studies in Australia (see, for example, Davies, 1982, 1989, 1993; Jordan, 1995; Knupfer, 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998), and America (Best, 1983; Thorne, 1993; Adler and Adler, 1998). There has also been similar work in the UK, with a particular proliferation within the last 4-5 years which has coincided with my own period of research [14]. There have been a series of academic papers and books written about infants in inter-city ethnic minority cultures (Connolly, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1996, 1998); working class masculinities (Skelton, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001); and gender discrimination and role-play (Francis, 1998). However, the only comparative studies in the UK that I know of come from Skelton (1997, 2001) and Renold (1999): Skelton examines the relationships between 6-7 year and 9-10 year olds (Years 3 and 5) in two primary schools, and Renold's work (which is her unpublished PhD thesis) explores the salience of gender and

sexuality in the lives of Year 6 boys and girls in two primary schools. Pollard (1985) provides a symbolic interactionist analysis of classroom interaction set in three UK primary schools. He does not pay significant attention to issues of gender and, in particular, does not directly address issues of masculinity in his work. Nevertheless, I have still found his study useful in describing boys' gendered practices, and have drawn on his concepts and descriptions of 'the official and unofficial school cultures', 'negotiated order' and peer group 'status'.

In the studies listed above pupils are seen to actively conform to, but usually either pragmatically accommodate to, or resist, school processes which produce a range of masculine identities. These identities can therefore be seen to be constructed and negotiated not only in relation to femininity and dominant or subordinate masculinities, but also in relation to schooling processes. This means that there is a need to look at the processes of schooling in primary education as they constitute possible opportunities and ways of being and becoming male.

#### *1.4 Theoretical and methodological starting points*

If this thesis was, instead, one long academic paper and I was asked by a prospective publishing journal to describe it using five key words, I would choose (after much consideration) 'boys', 'masculinity', 'peer-culture' 'school' and 'the body'. Central to my theoretical understandings of the social world in this thesis are the theories of symbolic interactionism, and those drawn from the work of Anthony Giddens and Robert Connell. Symbolic interactionism has allowed me to study the micro interactions of pupils set within their own peer culture; the work of Giddens has allowed me to view

these interactions through the wider structural context; and I have drawn on Connell, and other feminist inspired theories of masculinities, to produce a coherent theory of the boys' emerging masculine identities. Together, these theories and theorists have helped me construct a conceptual language in order to make sense of what I heard and what I saw, and to describe this in a theoretically informed and coherent manner.

#### ***1.4.1 Embodiment***

In this thesis I argue that masculinity does not exist as an ontological given but comes into existence as people act (Connell, 2000); in other words, masculinity is both a social process, and a set of material practices which refers to bodies and what bodies do. I do not want this ethnography to be emptied of material bodies but to be about real people leading real lives [15]. As such, a major theme in this study has embraced the idea of embodiment. There are a number of ways of defining embodiment, and 'common sense' definitions tend to view it as 'representing' or being 'representative of' a particular attribute, quality or characteristic so that, for example, a person may be an 'embodiment of justice' or an 'embodiment of evil' and so on. However, embodiment needs to be understood more as a social process (Elias, 1978), and sociological definitions consider the way people take on social processes and practices in bodily ways with the inscription of certain forms of identity on the body. The boys in this study are viewed as embodied social agents, for they do not merely have a passive body which is acted upon, but they are actively involved in the development of their bodies throughout their school life (and indeed for their entire life-span). They can be seen learning to control their bodies, and using them in the appropriate ways that being a boy demands; they experience themselves simultaneously *in* and *as* their bodies (Lyon and Barbalet, 1994:54) and in

this respect *they are bodies* (Turner, 2000). Thus the process of making and becoming a body also involves the project of making the self (Shilling, 1993). However, their bodies are not produced in isolation, but are located in particular social and historical spaces interconnected with social actors within a structured framework. There is a fuller discussion on embodiment in Section 2.6.

#### ***1.4.2 Writing up and presenting the findings***

My intention in writing this thesis is to follow Blumer's (1969) dictum to 'respect your subjects' and make the children/pupils [16] the participants, rather than the objects of the research process. The following account contains a variety of voices but my own authorial voice takes precedence because, ultimately, this thesis is my story, my narrative. Although the voices of the children have also been foregrounded, the voices of the teachers, and those drawn from the theoretical literature, empirical and qualitative studies and texts, also appear, with each being highlighted and emphasised at different moments throughout.

Of course, the following empirical explorations are my interpretations and are presented as 'conditional' and 'contextual' (Charmaz, 1995), as a product of a particular time and space. The relationship between what is knowable and observable is viewed as problematic, and therefore there is no 'true story' which assumes any direct access to 'reality'. In the process of writing this thesis I have been aware that there are many ways of (re)presenting my findings, and there is no single version or definitive way which is any better than the next (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). However, although the thesis is essentially a constructed piece of work or *artifice*, it nevertheless has the intention of telling a story, and therefore has a structure which takes the reader in a certain direction.



Moreover, my objective is to make the process as explicit as possible and make a clear statement of the relationship between my theory and data. Finally, this thesis is committed to the principles of honesty and integrity, and to representing an account which I hope does justice to the time and effort invested by each child and adult who is featured in the forthcoming chapters [17].

### ***1.5 The organisation of the thesis and the content of the chapters***

The final section of this chapter shows how the thesis has been structured and organised, and provides a brief examination and description of the succeeding chapters. Chapters 2-4 concerns theoretical and methodological issues, while chapters 5-9 report the empirical findings. Rather than a conventional literature review, I have integrated key works into the body of this thesis in order to develop and sustain my arguments.

I have called the three schools in this study, **Highwoods, Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey** (see Table 1.1) [18].

<b>Name of school</b>	<b>Type of school</b>	<b>Social characteristics of intake</b>
Highwoods	Private, fee-paying	Upper middle class
Petersfield	LEA	Middle class
Westmoor Abbey	LEA	Working class

Table 1.1 Names of schools; types and social characteristics of their intake

Chapter 2 outlines and reviews some of the main theoretical perspectives that I draw on in this thesis, which are structuration, symbolic interactionism and feminist-inspired theories of masculinity, particularly those from Connell. I also explain how I am intending to use and define a number of key terms such as ‘identity’, ‘embodiment’ and ‘power’. One of the underlying principles that is integral to this thesis comes from Marx’s aphorism that ‘Men (sic) [in this case, ‘boys’] make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing’ (Marx, 1963 [1952]), which I understand to mean that, although the boys in this study are ‘skilled and knowledgeable agents’ (Giddens, 1984), they find themselves living within wider structural relations and are only able to act as far as their structural position allows them to. The boys in the study are involved in the interactional work of making meanings, and many of their forms of actions are based on the interpretations they make through interactions with others. The chapter then summarises some of the main arguments around the concept of masculinity viewed as a collective endeavour that is socially constructed, negotiated and performed. Although I understand the boys’ emerging identities to be an ongoing and changing life project, I wish to retain the idea that some aspects of character remain coherent and constant. There follows a discussion of the body and embodiment which is an integral theme in this thesis, and I emphasise that the body is both active and acted upon. I argue that the body is a site of contestation, and that, although the underlying intention of schooling is to produce ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault, 1977), the boys in this study are involved in negotiating their own meanings, and modifying and thus resisting these attempts. Finally, I consider the notion of power which is connected with getting things done and changing the course of events. However, I also review Foucault’s concepts of

disciplinary power, surveillance, and ‘bio-power’ which I find particularly productive when applied to understanding the school as an institution.

Chapter 3 begins with an examination of the institutional features of the school setting. Although schools can be sites of social change, I contest they are essentially regulatory institutions best understood in terms of a Foucauldian conception of discipline and surveillance. Within the last 15 years or so schools have been placed in a competitive market, and are infused with discourses of corporate management and accountability. A fundamental argument in this thesis is that the school is a key site in the formation of masculinities, and each has a set of identifiable ‘masculinising’ practices. Although schools are located within wider structures, each has its own gender regime, and these localised practices and ‘storylines’ have a profound influence on the ways boys construct their identities. An important analytical feature in this thesis is the dual existence of a school’s official/formal culture, and the boys’ own unofficial/informal culture which work in relation to each other. After discussing the notion of ‘childhood’ and ‘the child’, which I understand to be adult-centred, historical and transitory constructions, I explore the problematics of researching young children in school. These include my own role and responsibilities as a researcher, and I consider power relations, and ethical issues of confidentiality and informed consent. Finally, I provide a definition of the term ‘ethnography’ and outline a range of skills and qualities which are involved.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to show how the study was designed in a way which enabled me to address the research questions. It delineates the methods I employed and then discusses specific methodological issues which arose. After providing details of a preliminary pilot project in which I honed my field techniques, and prepared the

questions to be investigated in the main study, I give details of the three schools which were selected on the basis of the social characteristics of their intake. The two principal methods of data gathering came from observation and group interviews. After supplying contextual information, and describing the processes of my fieldwork, I evaluate the status and validity of the data, and argue that interviews are, essentially, co-constructed accounts. I then consider issues of triangulation, contamination and reactivity, and emphasise that as the instrument of data gathering, the researcher is an inevitable and constituent part of the research process. Although I acknowledge that this thesis is a textually constructed account, I do not want to dematerialise the social and cultural, and I want to emphasise that this study is a story about real, embodied people living real lives. After outlining the process of transcription of interviews and fieldnotes, the final section looks at issues of analysis and writing up. My objective throughout is to make the process as visible and unequivocal as possible, and to show how the principles of selection (that operate throughout the research process) were used through the analysis to the presentation of my conclusions. I examine the dialogic relation between theory and data, and describe the processes and benefits involved in using the computer program NUD\*IST, particularly for conceptually organising and coding data. Finally, I review the issue of transforming data during the process of writing and representation, and discuss my role as a translator moving from the empirical material to a recognisable language of description.

The intention of Chapter 5 is to supply important contextual information concerning the three school settings, and to discuss the similarities and differences between them, paying particular attention to the main features of the official school cultures. A key argument in this thesis is that these localised structures have a major effect on the way the boys

construct their masculinities, for they produce a different series of meanings and practices which, in turn, provide a different series of opportunities of *doing* boy. It describes and examines each of the schools under the headings of the physical sites; the catchment areas and parental expectations; their ethos; their organisation and management policies; the classroom environments, and, it also profiles the headteachers and class teachers. Finally, I outline the criteria that I have used to classify each school on the basis of the social characteristics of its intake.

Chapter 6 introduces the boys who are the central focus in this study. I discuss the characteristics of the informal culture in each setting which again (like the formal culture) exhibits a number of similarities and differences between schools. Another main argument in this thesis is that masculinity is a collective enterprise, and that the boy's own peer group is one of the most important features of any school setting. Each peer group has its own identity and series of cultural norms, and these are a leading influence on the formation of masculinities. The chapter also looks at the composition and structure of the boys' friendship groups, and considers a number of boys who have been classified by myself, and from peer nominations, as 'leaders', and who both reflect and influence peer group norms. Finally, I consider information on pupils' SATs scores as an indicator of their relative academic performances. While these reveal a strong association between a pupil's social class and the school's level of academic attainment, it is interesting (in the context of the discourses on boys' underachievement) to see that boys clearly outperform girls at the two LEA schools, while levels of attainment are almost the same at the independent school.

Chapter 7 addresses the institutional setting of the school and discusses relations between the formal and informal cultures. The main argument is that the vast majority of boys manage skilfully to negotiate a successful balance between these two areas of support, and form a pragmatic accommodation with the formal school regime. The majority understand that examination success leads to increased career options and material remuneration, and therefore, they use the school as a resource which provides a means to an end. Although I also draw attention to the risks the boys face in conforming too closely with the formal regime, high academic performance and attainment in class did not automatically lead to peer reprovment, and had a neutral affect on the boys' peer group status in two out of the four classes in the study. Most of the school rules were concerned with the (attempted) regulation and control of the body, but the vast majority of the pupils saw them as being designed in their own interests. Although there was resistance to the formal regime at each school, I found no evidence of a significant counter-school culture, and although there were far greater amounts of intransigence at Westmoor Abbey, the boys did not wholly reject the values or the authority of the school. I propose that the majority of the disruptive behaviour came from boys, and link this to the performative nature of masculinity which they used as a strategy to gain popularity and status. However, I also highlight the teacher's part in pupil misbehaviour, and their role in gender constructions in general. After briefly reviewing the boys' responses to competitive reward systems, the final section examines cross-gender relations and their effect on the formation of masculine identities. There was a general tendency for boys and girls to keep apart, and I highlight the risks involved for boys who attempted to bridge the gender divide. Although there is a need for boys to categorise girls as 'other', I argue that the boys in the study classified the girls as 'different' rather than oppositional. Although the boys tended to dominate space, and girls were usually

excluded from the games of football, the data shows times when girls were able to exercise power over the boys.

Chapter 8 is set at the localised level of the boys' own culture and argues that an integral part of the boys' negotiations of masculinity is the need to gain status, which leads to a hierarchical position within the peer group. Specifically, it explores the different kinds of resources and strategies that the boys are able to draw on. As each school has its own distinct 'set of storylines' or 'repertoires of action' (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998), the boys were able to draw on a series of different resources and strategies in each setting, and had various options and opportunities which I have classified as being either open (possible), restricted (difficult) or closed (virtually impossible). Sporting and athletic prowess were key signifiers of successful and favoured masculinity, and the single most highly esteemed resource that the boys employed to establish peer group status was physicality/athleticism which ran across all three schools. I also examine other embodied resources that the boys utilised such as acting tough/hard; using humour and wit (including cussing –a form of verbal insult); the wearing of popularly fashionable clothes and training shoes; and the possession and articulation of culturally-celebrated knowledge such as football talk and the latest computer games. Finally, I consider the status of having a girlfriend, although this type of relationship was exceptionally rare and it had relatively little effect in this study.

The final chapter of the empirical section, Chapter 9, moves to the structural level of my analysis and explains how I have understood the diverse forms of masculinity found within each school setting. Instead of using typologies, which I found inadequate to describe the intricacies of the boys' identities, I have theorised the different types of

masculinity by looking at the relations between them. I have used the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to describe exemplary forms of masculinity which held the greatest cultural authority, and although these forms were context specific, and had a series of different features at each school, they were still formed and based around the physicality of the body. Depending on the setting, some of these hegemonic/dominant forms were more stable, more visible, more violent, and more conformist than others, and while some were generated and sanctioned by the official school regime, others were created by the boys themselves. Although I have drawn on the theories of Connell, and incorporated his terms of hegemonic, complicit and subordinated masculinity, I have also found myself needing to propose other forms and relations of masculinity which I have called ‘liminal’ and ‘personalised’. In doing so, my intention is to add to existing understandings. Liminal refers to an aspirant masculinity found on the edge of dominant forms which is embodied in boys who are seen to have a deficit of adequate resources, while personalised forms relate to boys who appear content to pursue their own distinctive types of identity, and do not aspire to, or attempt to imitate, the leading version of masculinity. The last section in this chapter looks at subordinated patterns of masculinity which hegemonic forms pursue using the generic strategies of difference and/or deficiency. In a discussion of the prevalent and pervasive use of homophobia, I conclude that, although masculinity defines itself as exclusively heterosexual, and homophobic abuse is used as a means of normalising a boy’s masculine identity, it is also employed to position boys at the bottom of the peer group hierarchy as ‘non-masculine’ and/or ‘effeminate’ and can, therefore, be conceptualised in terms of *gender* as well as *sex*.

The conclusion, Chapter 10, reviews and summarises the main points raised in the preceding chapters in relation to the main research question(s). I look at possible



generalisations, and discuss the main contribution I believe the thesis makes to the growing body of research into young boys' masculinities. Finally, I examine some of the limitations of the empirical work, consider some areas that were not explored, and propose some possible areas for future research.

### **Footnotes**

[1] The discourse is also prominent in many English-speaking countries (such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), and other Organisation for Economic Growth and Development Nations (Yates, 1997; Epstein et al., 1998; Francis, 2000).

[2] Pollard and Triggs (2000:3) contend that the Education Reform Act 'was the most radical education legislation for half a century, and a decade of unremitting change followed it'.

[3] The academic performance of girls had actually been improving since 1978 but had, seemingly, gone unnoticed (Newbould, 1996).

[4] Quoted in Francis (2000)

[5] Quoted in Francis (2000)

[6] Francis actually refers to boys failing to match girls' achievements *at GCSE level*.

Moreover, she only identifies the *Poor Boy* discourse as opposed to the combination of *Poor Boys* and *Failing School, Failing Boy* that I present.

[7] This is a continuation of the 'discourse of derision' which was first identified by Kenway (1987) and subsequently referred to by Ball (1990). It was characterised by right wing attacks on state education in England and can be traced back to 1976 with Callaghan's Ruskin College speech.

[8] Abraham's monograph *Divide and School* was actually written in 1989 but did not appear in print till 1995.

[9] Delamont (2000) argues that, sometimes, there has been a over-romanticised fascination with boys who have rejected schooling. Indeed, Walkerdine (1990) argues that Willis (1977) experienced a kind of exhilaration and admiration in his associations with 'the lads', and this elevation of 'the hooligan' has meant that the wider picture of schooling has often been neglected.

[10] It also depends on how you measure them? For example, the 'gender gap' is concentrated at the high achieving end and is much less significant if you measure by aggregate GCSE score (equivalent of obtaining one extra GCSE at grade C), rather than take the percentage of pupils getting 5 GCSEs at grade C or above (*TES* 16.1.98).

[11] For example, the gap between the hourly rate of pay of men and women working full time was 18% in 2000 (EOC, 2000)

[12] The most notable UK studies set in the secondary school are by Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970), Furlong (1976, 1977, 1985), Willis (1977), Ball (1981), Brown (1987), Woods (1990) and Mac an Ghaill (1994).

[13] This is despite the fact that many of the key concerns around academic performance, disaffected attitudes and behaviour, and truancy rates are equally applicable to boys in primary school (Skelton, 2001).

[14] In addition to the citations listed below from Connolly, Francis, Renold and Skelton, further valuable work comes from Epstein (1997a, 1997b, 1998c), Renold (1997, 2000), Benjamin (1998, 2001), Francis (2000) and Swain (2000).

[15] Wacquant (1995) argues that the irony of the increasing interest in the body in social science literature is the absence of empirical studies that deal with the experiences of real blood and flesh (Light and Kirk, 2000). Moreover, childhood would appear to be a time when work on the body and by the body is relatively intense (Prout, 2000), as physical development gets into its stride.

[16] Throughout the thesis, 'child/children' and 'pupil'/'pupils' are used on an interchangeable basis.

[17] Writing up a PhD thesis also presents another particular tension, for although I am presenting myself as member of the academic discourse community, I am also aware that I am a novice and, perhaps more importantly, I am an examinee.

[18] Throughout this thesis all names of places and people have been changed.

## **Chapter 2      Understanding the social world; and theories of masculinity**

### ***2.1 Introduction***

This chapter explores some of the main theoretical perspectives which have influenced and underpinned the approach taken in this thesis. I consider Giddens's structuration theory, symbolic interactionism and the feminist-inspired theories of masculinity; and I also explain how I am going to define and use key terms such as 'identity', 'the body' and 'power'. However, rather than attempt to set out any comprehensive theoretical analysis of these conceptual terms, my primary concern is to incorporate them into the theoretical account that I am developing for this present study, to show how these affect my understandings and interpretations of the empirical data, and to provide me with a conceptual language which is able to describe and make sense of what was happening in the three schools.

The research in this thesis is situated in the microcultural experiences of the school and is concerned with the nature and dynamics of the interpersonal encounters and relationships within Year 6 boys' peer networks. I am primarily interested in 'the cultural', looking at the ways the boys make meanings and values, and interpreting the symbolic resources and strategies that they use in order to establish status as they construct, negotiate and perform their masculine identities.

As I view all human action as having an irreducible interpretative component, my research has needed to be ethnographically based and sensitive to the 'complex skills'

which the actors display in their day-to-day activities. The pupils in my study are viewed as active, 'skilled and knowledgeable agents' (Giddens, 1984), capable of articulating and constructing their experiences and perceptions, and they are not simply the passive subjects of external structural forces like those based in the correspondence theories of Bowles and Gintis (1976). They have some choice over how they conduct their lives, they are able to theorise about their world and take action based on their interpretations of their circumstances. However, I am also aware that they are still living within a context of wider structural relations, and they can only act so far as their structural position allows them to, and so I need to look at the broader social system beyond the school, to practices and relations which are stretched across time and space. Like Connell et al. (1982), I am maintaining that, although individual lives can only be understood by an appreciation of the wider social processes; equally, these processes can only be understood through the way they affect particular, personal lives.

## *2.2 Giddens's theory of structuration*

Of course, trying to understand the ways in which wider structures affect the behaviour of human beings is hardly new; it is one of the most fundamental and persistent problems of sociology. Social action inherently defies all efforts to produce a broadly acceptable unifying theory, and has traditionally divided itself along the continuum of action and structure. An institution such as school cannot be understood without examining the behaviours of the people that fill it; nor can the face-to-face interaction of the people inside be understood without an examination of the wider institutional context. In order to try and understand what is going on in these three schools I have drawn on a number of theorists including Giddens, whose theory of structuration is a deliberate attempt to

overcome the positivist/anti-positivist divide, and construct a theoretical synthesis between structural and action approaches (see, in particular, Giddens, 1979, 1984, 1987, 1991). The core of structuration theory is encapsulated in Marx's aphorism which actually appears in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* of 1852: 'Men (sic) make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing' (Marx, 1963:15), so that, although human beings may make their own history, they do not make it just as they please, in circumstances which they can choose, but in circumstances that are already there, given, and transmitted from the past. In relation to my own theoretical understanding of the social world this is the position that I am proposing to take throughout this thesis: the school is the setting that I am looking at where the children 'make history' (as well as making themselves of course), by producing and reproducing social practices, but not in circumstances (or structures) of their own choosing.

Layder (1994) argues that the majority of sociologists would probably agree with Marx's statement; the problem lies in its interpretation, and the emphasis that you wish to place either on human agency and/or the surrounding structural systems. In order to overcome the structure/agency divide Giddens posits a dialogical relation between structure and (human) action. He refers to the 'duality of structure', whereby structures not only constrain and determine behaviour, they also enable it; or, they provide opportunities for action as well as limitations. Moreover, although the action (which takes place through 'social practices') always, inevitably, occurs within a structural context, this context is transformed or redefined by the action. To put it another way: structures are constituted by action and action is constituted structurally, or, to use Giddens's famous dictum: structure in social life 'is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices'. (Giddens, 1979:4)

Giddens defines 'structure' as a set of rules and resources which actors draw upon as they proceed to produce and reproduce society in their everyday lives. Rules refer to tacitly understood social procedures and they vary (Cohen, 1987): some may be more explicit and codified than others (such as school rules and regulations), while others are unwritten and apply to the minutiae of human behaviour in public settings (such as body gestures, eye contact). Resources are either 'allocative', which refer to control over the material world and enable people to get things done (such as start up a business) or, 'authoritative' which refer to control over the social world and generate domination over people (such as through status or hierarchical position) (Layder, 1994). Resources underpin a person's transformative capacity, or their ability to effect change in their social circumstances: they may be certain pieces of socially shared knowledge and skills which people have picked up both formally (such as from teachers in school education) or informally, via friends and family etc, and can be thought of as 'interactional skills' which people use in their own unique way during everyday social encounters/interactions.

The boys in this study employ both these kinds of resources in order to gain and establish status (and popularity) within their peer group culture, and to position themselves with, or against, the official school culture. Of course these resources will always exist within determinate historical and spatial conditions; moreover, the resources that are available will vary within different settings, and some may be easier to draw on than others at particular times and in particular places. Some resources may be physical (sporty, tough etc); intellectual (general academic capability and achievement); economic (money); social and linguistic (interpersonal); cultural (in touch with the latest fashions, music, TV programmes etc), but ultimately, they are all symbolic in that their power and influence



derives from their effect, and from what they are perceived to mean and stand for. Moreover, the boys who use a set of authoritative resources and interactional skills to establish a high status in the dominant pupil hierarchy in one school will not necessarily be able to sustain this position in another.

Giddens's structure is 'internal' to activity and has no existence beyond the situations in which people are acting in; this is referred to as 'virtual existence' which can be found as memory traces in people who use its rules and resources. Moreover, structure only exists at the time and in the space in which the rules and resources are actually being employed through the activities of people, and as such, institutions like schools do not have any life of their own. Thus, ontologically, these institutions only exist insofar as they are intertwined with people's actions and motivations [1].

The overriding problem for Giddens is how to preserve and maintain the mutuality of action and structure together while still being able to talk about them separately, and his theory of structuration has had a number of critiques. As Archer (1990) and Willmott (1999) point out, the 'duality of structure' unhelpfully compacts agency and structure into one indistinguishable entity in a kind of conceptual vice which prevents an examination of their interplay, and means that the influences upon one another cannot be teased out. While recognising that agency and structure are inseparable, theorists such as Layder (1994) aim to combine them rather than aspire to a complete synthesis of the two approaches, and certainly in my own study I would like to be able to distinguish between the macro context (such as the education system, government policy etc) and the micro interactional context of the school concerning the internal relations between the actors or participants.

Layder (1994) maintains that Giddens (1983) does not attempt to impose a 'total world view' or envisage a wholesale application but, rather, sees his theory as a set of 'sensitising' concepts which are to be used to aid understanding in a research problem. This is the way I intend to use his work, although it must be said that much of sociology, and particularly that concerned with empirical research, remains unaffected and uninfluenced by structuration theory. According to Giddens (1984) himself, the most well known application is Willis's notable study *Learning to Labour* (1977) although, of course, this was written before structuration theory had been fully developed [2] [3].

Although structuration is useful in providing a link between action and structure and between macro and micro, it is unable to provide a sufficient theoretical understanding of relations between people at the empirical micro level. As the main focus of my study involves the interpersonal interactions of pupils, and how they make meaning in the highly localised setting of the school, I have found myself needing to draw upon other theories specifically concerned with this area.

### ***2.3 Symbolic interactionism***

My research is essentially concerned with the behaviour of human beings. My focus is on the social, rather than the psychological or genetic basis of their actions, and which I see as the product of how they experience and make sense of the world around them; a world which has similarities and differences within the three school settings. As the major part of my research concentrates on the subjects' (especially, the boys') point of view, and on the meanings they attribute to experiences, events and activities, I have

found myself influenced by, and have drawn on, the theories of symbolic interactionism which has the premise that human beings 'act' on the basis of meanings and understandings which arise through the interactions with others (Pollard, 1985; Filmer et al., 1998).

Symbolic interactionism has its most significant intellectual antecedents with the American pragmatism of James, Peirce and Dewey where truth is appraised in terms of its usefulness and value [4]. While George Herbert Mead may have inspired the development of symbolic interactionism, the term was first used in a short article by Herbert Blumer in 1937 (Plummer, 1996), and Blumer is generally acknowledged as the founder of the Chicago school which represents the dominant trend within the tradition. For Plummer, the theory of symbolic interactionism has been one of the most enduring theories of the last century and its recent exponents include Denzin (1977, 1983, 1991a); King (1978); Fine (1983, 1990, 1993, 1995); Pollard (1985; 2000); Delamont (1990); Pollard and Filer, (1996, 1999); Plummer (1991, 1996) and Woods (1983; 1990).

For Plummer (1996), symbolic interactionism can be summarised in four interconnecting themes. The first suggests that human action is constituted in, and through, the use of symbols which allows actors to make their own history, cultures, and intricate patterns of communication. The key interest for interactionist sociology is the manner by which human beings actively and creatively go about the task of making *meaning*. It concerns how we define ourselves (our bodies, behaviours and actions); how we define the various situations that we are engaged in; how these meanings evolve through interactions with others; and how they are reproduced, and transformed through social encounters. The most important source of symbolic meaning in social life is language, although other

symbols like our appearance, dress, demeanour and general behaviour are also important. For interactionists, meanings are held to be emergent and shifting, and although humans create shared meanings through habitual routines, they are often ambiguous and always open to further evaluations and modifications.

The second theme concerns *process*, the way that lives, identities, situations and societies are always, and everywhere, evolving and becoming. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with active human beings who, like the pupils (and teachers) in my research, are developing interpretations, negotiating and constructing an identity through interactions with others. The interactionist Cooley (1956) used the term 'looking-glass self' to describe how we see an image, or get an impression of ourselves, through the responses of others. This means that our self-image is heavily influenced by the reactions of other individuals who we come into contact with, and we use their interpretations as evidence of who we think we really are and then behave accordingly. As Jones wittily says, 'I am what I think you think I am' (P. Jones, 1993:84). Interactionists argue that it is the *effect* of these interpretations that we need to study, and that we should always bear in mind the dictum of W. I. Thomas (cited in Plummer, 1996:228), that 'when [people] define situations as real, they become real in their consequences.' Of course these interpretations may be inaccurate or plain wrong, but what matters most is the consequences of their application, especially in the way that the recipients of the interpretations come to view themselves. For example, if a pupil comes to believe that they are seen by their peers as tough and confrontational, the chances are that they will act out and become that tough and confrontational person; if a pupil comes to believe that they are viewed by the teacher as being lazy and poor at their school work, the likelihood is that they will concentrate on playing out that role in a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The third theme is *interaction*, as it is concerned with collective behaviour through which lives are organised and lived out. Rather than concentrating on the individual *or* society as discrete entities, it emphasises the individual self engaging and interacting with the social other and is, thus, fundamentally, concerned with 'how people do things together' (Becker, 1986).

The fourth theme concerns its connection and engagement with the *empirical micro world* and empirical investigation. As Blumer (1969:47) says: 'symbolic interactionism is a down-to-earth approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct...its methodological stance, accordingly, is that of direct examination of the empirical world.'

Symbolic interactionism stresses the active and creative roles which people play in the construction of their social self. Individuals are viewed as primarily conscious and rational beings who are, certainly for the most part, in control of their social performances; the reasons for action are found in the social process itself and not in some prior, and unconscious, motivational desires. They use their capacity to be self-reflexive in order to present and perform the person they wish others to think they are. In many ways, they are presenting a façade, or playing a role, in order to elicit the responses from others that they desire. The interactionist theorist who is most commonly associated with this emphasis on creative role-playing is Erving Goffman (1959) who analyses and describes social life by using the metaphor of the theatre. He sees life as a social stage on which humans play themselves in certain roles, and manage the impressions that they give through 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959:206). Although Goffman later

recognised that he had over-extended the dramaturgical analogy by mistaking the theatrical part of everyday life for the whole part of everyday life, it is nevertheless the case that people often try to control their appearance, their dress, their interests, habits and general behaviour in order to encourage people they meet to see them as the people they wish to, and claim, to be. In some ways we are all our own advertising agents (Craib, 1992), and the whole process is underpinned by what Goffman (1983) calls 'Felicity's condition', which means we act in a such a way that shows that there is an underlying sanity behind our actions. In other words, we are obliged to act in a certain way to avoid being thought of as incompetent, deranged or 'a little weird' by right-minded people that surround us.

Symbolic interactionism is only really interested in, and concerned with, human action at the micro level, and interactionists have been accused of failing to connect the face-to-face, transient aspects of interactional behaviour to its more durable structural features, contexts and forces, which may both constrain and enable action by human beings (see, for example, Gouldner, 1971; Brittan, 1973). Symbolic interactionism tends to miss, or simply ignore, the ways in which meaning is influenced and shaped by such structural inequalities of power, wealth, social class, gender, ethnicity/race, sexuality, age and geographical location. However, Baldwin (1986) argues that Mead has made a greater contribution to the understanding of relations between micro and macro structures than is widely recognised, writing that he 'developed a unified theory of society that integrates both micro and macro social events as they evolve and change over time' (1986:6).

Plummer (1996) maintains that it is no longer possible to write interactionism off as an astrucutural, apolitical, ahistorical theory, and points out that there has been a real interest

in macro sociology in comparatively recent work by, for example, Denzin (1977), Couch (1984) and Hall (1987) which has substantially attempted to bridge the micro-macro gap. Symbolic interactionism certainly has an affinity with structuration theory, and Layder (1994:65) reminds us that Cooley (1956) was maintaining around a hundred years ago that 'there is no such thing as an individual separate from society any more than there is such a thing as society apart from the individuals who constitute it'. Moreover, it views institutions, such as a school, as the product of human interaction, rather than an external object. Although Goffman recognises that the interactional and institutional orders are completely dependent on each other, like Archer (1990) and Willmott (1999), he claims that the interaction order contains a set of *different* features of constraint and enablement than those provided by the institutional or structural order and can, therefore, be regarded as having a distinctive social area for analysis.

Some researchers such as Fine (cited in Plummer, 1996:245) and Plummer (1996) also see symbolic interactionism as the harbinger of postmodern and poststructuralist social thought, and both their affinities, as well as their incompatibilities, have been a frequent ongoing focus for debate in the volumes of *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* from the late 1980s [5]. Certainly, there are a number of fundamental differences: for instance, poststructuralist theory privileges notions of discourse, discursive practices and knowledge/power, and, its psychoanalytic influences (notably from Lacan) emphasise the psychic compulsions of the unconscious as a reason for action. Moreover, symbolic interactionism does not specifically address the ontological status of the world. And yet, there is still quite an overlap between the two theories with their rejection of grand theories and meta narratives; their concerns with signs and symbols; the interest in culture and media; the emphasis on researcher's reflexivity; the focus on social

construction and social identity; and particularly, the concentration on meaning. Indeed, interactionists believe that human action can only be investigated by gaining access to the meanings that guide it. Fine (1991:145) goes as far as to claim that post-structuralists are currently merely 'discovering what interactionists have claimed all along: the contingent nature of meaning and hence, of reality'.

From an early stage in my conceptual thinking, the theories of symbolic interactionism seemed to accommodate the majority of my theoretical requirements: it concerns the *collective, social* behaviour of pupils who are engaged in the making of *meaning*, and who are in the *process* of constructing, negotiating, performing and *defining* their *identities* through the *interactions* with others in the *empirical* world of the school.

#### ***2.4 Understanding identity***

In *Modernity and its Futures*, Hall (1992) eloquently and succinctly outlines three classic conceptions of identity: the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and the post-modern subject. The subject dating from the eighteenth century Enlightenment is seen as a rational, free-thinking individual, unified with an inner central core who, essentially, remains the same person throughout their lifetime. This approach has been criticised as being biologically deterministic - and it is hard to reconcile with the idea of identity as a social construction - but there is no denying that it still has a profound impact on 'common-sense' understandings of identity, based on essentialist notions of masculinity, which are endemic in the popular discourses on boys' educational issues (see, for example, work by Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991; Biddulph, 1994, 1995, 1997).



The sociological subject is based on the symbolic interactionist notion that although the subject still has an inner core which is 'the real me' this is formed and shaped by an ongoing dialogue with the surrounding cultural world and is, therefore, open to the possibility of change. An important element in this is the development of self awareness, for as Berger and Berger (1976:73) say:

only if an identity is confirmed by others, is it possible for that identity to be real to the individual holding it. In other words, identity is the product of a interplay of identification and self-identification.

This also leads to the concept of 'social identity' whereby individuals derive definitions of self which are based on collective membership and identifications with particular social groups (and which obviously include pupil peer groups at school).

Mead divides the self into 'I' and 'me'. The 'I' is the active part of the self while the 'me' is the part which others act upon. As the individual becomes aware of the 'me', they are able to act upon themselves by controlling it. In fact, Mead maintains that the 'I' is dynamic and can control and direct the self, not only to conform, but also to act independently. In this account, identity and the individual are interwoven with structure, but as the individual subject loses its stability it becomes more fragmented and variable (Blumer, 1969).

The postmodern subject adopts different identities at different times, and far from being unified around a stable self, identities are dislocated, shifting, frequently contradictory, and essentially unfinished (see, for example, Henriques et al., 1984; Hollway, 1984, 1989; Jones and Moore, 1992; Hall and du Gay, 1996; Hey, 1997). As Hall says, identity

belongs as much to the future as to the past for it is a matter of 'becoming' as much as 'being', and it is also more about individuals having a series of on-going *identifications* by accepting, negotiating with, contesting and reconstructing meanings (Hall, 1992:287).

Just as we saw similarities between symbolic interactionism and postmodern theories in the last section, there is also an overlap between the two theories concerning the concept of identity. Although Mead and other interactionists posit a dominant 'whole' centre, Goffman, (1961) does not accept that a person's self-identity is limited to a singular 'core' image. For him, people have a number of different facets to their personalities, and through 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959:206) they consciously decide to present different sides of themselves to different people at different times who, they believe, will value them in a favourable light. This means that they may seem like a different person with their friends at the football match, to the person teaching a class the following morning. However, in many respects the issue still remains confused. Layder (1994) contends that the relationship between the 'I' and 'me' lacks adequate definition and, further, argues that symbolic interactionism does not resolve the question of the 'unity of the self': do people have a dominant 'core' self, which they carry around with them, and to which other 'satellite' selves attach themselves to (as advocated by Turner, 1988); or do they have a number of fully formed selves which they consciously decide to present to different people on different occasions? (as advocated by Goffman, 1961).

The whole concept of identity is a difficult issue to disentangle and fully resolve. It is full of abstruse, complex theories, and as we have just seen above, different theorists can produce a range of conflicting positions and ideas from within the same sociological school of thought [6]. As Hall says, 'identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we

think' (Hall, 1990:222), and yet, the young boys in the three schools were all there trying to establish their emergent individual and collective identities, and so their sense of identity, and how it is shaped and lived out at school, is of fundamental importance to my enquiry.

Many of my views concerning identity correspond to the postmodern/poststructuralist position, and I find myself in accord with many of its propositions: individual identities are an ongoing, lifelong, project which are never finished; they are socially constructed, negotiated and performed; they are unstable and shifting; they are frequently contradictory; and different identities can be, and often are, adopted at different times. However I still wish to hang on to the symbolic interactionist notion that individuals still retain an inner 'core' identity onto which these shifting, fragmented, unstable identities attach themselves and leave at least some residual trace, and it is this conception of identity that I wish to present in this thesis. It allows me to explore how the boys in the study are able to construct, negotiate, renegotiate, present, manage, and perform a variety of different identities to different people at different times, whilst retaining an essence of self.

Francis (2000) is another theorist who has come to question the post-structuralist notion of the 'death of the coherent self', writing that 'some aspects of our individual characters appear to remain constant, despite other aspects altering depending on the discursive environment or over time' (Francis, 2000:20). Pollard and Filer (1999:21) also draw attention to the role of an individual's 'biological' resources, for as they say, 'neither physical and intellectual capacities nor affective dispositions are genetically fixed – but they do remain important factors in exploring 'capability', or the 'potential' to act. I

would also like to include this view in my concept of identity which, in this sense, can be understood as ‘an internal-external dialectic of identification’ (Jenkins, 1996:171), played out continuously through the interactions with others.

Identity is fashioned through biography, and the ‘self’, as Rowan Williams wrote, ‘is what the past is doing now’ (cited in Pollard and Filer, 1996:306). Individuals possess, and carry around with them, what Layder (1994) refers to as their own ‘psychobiography’, which is a collection of their own unique personal experiences that they use as a resource to shape and form their current attitudes and behavioural dispositions. This includes former (often chance) meetings with ‘significant’ people and ‘others’, such as parents, friends, working colleagues etc, who all have the potential to make us into a different type of person. Although we can acknowledge Marx’s famous aphorism that we are living our lives ‘but not in circumstances of [our] own choosing’, we all, nevertheless, come across a number of ‘significant’ people in our lives who make a substantial difference which affects its course and its outcomes. Our whole identity, our sense of self, depends a great deal upon the management and outcome of innumerable social encounters and interactions with these, and innumerable others. However, this is not in any way to deny the influence of structures such as gender, which is singularly apposite in this study, and which writers such as Davies (1989, 1993) and Francis (2000) argue is a cornerstone of identity. Nor should we forget poverty, social-class, ethnicity/race, sexuality, age, geographical location and so on: after all, identity is part of agency which is inherently related to, and shaped by, the politico-economic, socio-cultural circumstances in which the individual finds her/himself, and it is simply impossible to speak of the individual dislocated from the social (see, for example, Elias, 1978, 1982; Giddens, 1991; Pollard and Filer, 1996, 1999). In other words (and

recollecting theories of structuration), individuals can be creative and transformative agents, but only when the circumstances allow for it.

### *2.5 Social theories of masculinity*

The relationship between boys' lives at school and its institutionalised structure is essentially an issue about masculinity, and the boys' construction of their masculinity is at the very heart of this thesis: it is the way they make meanings, and organises the way they see the world. Many recent theoretical conceptualisations about masculinity have been coherently summarised by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) and, along with Connell (1987, 1995, 1996, 2000), they highlight the inadequacies of sex-roles/socialisation theories, and affirm a number of key points from recent feminist and feminist-inspired work: masculinity is a relational construct occupying a place in gender relations; there are multiple masculinities; there are hierarchies of masculinities; masculinity is a precarious and ongoing performance; and it is generally a collective social enterprise. This is the position that I wish to take and portray in this thesis.

We have come a long way from the socialisation/sex-role frameworks which informed earlier studies of gender in primary and infant schools (see, for example, Clarricoates, 1978, 1980, 1987; Serbin, 1980; Evans, 1987; Delamont, 1990) [7]. Many writers (see, for example, Arnot, 1991; Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Skelton, 2001) have persuasively argued that theories of socialisation and sex-roles are inadequate as they ignore the complex, dynamic and frequently contradictory nature of gender. These theories of socialisation imply that there is a general social consensus about gender roles which can be used as a guide and 'learnt' in a

one-way mechanical process [8]; while sex-role theories suggest that there are a set of universal, unitary male and female characteristics which have some how been defined as normal, and on which children can model themselves.

### *2.5.1 Masculinity as a relational social construct*

Masculinity is not an *a priori* ontological fact but is a set of social, cultural and material practices: it is something we *do*, rather than *have* or *are* (see, for example, West and Zimmerman, 1987; Thorne, 1993). As such, these practices are always open to contestation and/or the possibility of being expressed and performed in different ways. It is an inherently relational concept, and although the experiences of gender for boys is often intricate and changes with context, their performance of masculinity is always constructed in relation to a dominant image of gender difference (Pattman et al., 1998) for masculinity only makes sense when it is placed in relation to femininity: in other words, masculinity is defined by what femininity is not. In schools, the oppositions coalesce along two competing discourses and boys negotiate both between and within them. In Western culture (at least) these are usually represented as the following dichotomous pattern (see Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998:143 and Francis, 2000:15) [9]:

<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>
Rationality	Emotion
Strength	Weakness
Aggression	Care
Competition	Co-operation
Activity	Passivity
Independence	Dependence
Sporting	School work
Playing	Reading
Science	Nature/arts

Although these are a set of notional social and cultural constructions, and nobody is going to exhibit all the associative attributes listed above to the preclusion of others, these core values rest behind all constructions of masculinity or femininity and, indeed, it would be impossible to recognise or talk about any discernible masculinity or femininity without them (see Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Francis, 2000). Of course, this is not to say, that these traits are not sometimes contradictory or blurred, nor that gender identity can be constructed differently by different people in different settings, cultures and social classes. Moreover, boys can display qualities of feminine conduct and be bearers of femininity and vice versa: the fundamental point is that there are differences *within* the categories 'girl' and 'boy', as well as *between* girls and boys.

We should also remember that these gender relations are imbued with relations of power, and that these are highly unequal between men and women, for despite significant challenges to it, systems of patriarchal power still structure gender relations (Messner and Sabo, 1990; Connell, 1995). Feminist critical appropriations of Lacanian psychoanalysis have suggested that boys and men come to be constructed as the norm, and girls and women as lacking (see, for example, Mitchell, 1974; Elliott, 1992), and in her study of masculinity in the early years of schooling in Australia, Jordan (1995) contends that many boys produce definitions of masculinity which have as their main constituent, 'not female', or 'other'.

### ***2.5.2 Multiple masculinities***

The idea of recognising multiple masculinities is another important aspect, although this does not mean that boys will inhabit one and remain untouched by others. Gilbert and

Gilbert see multiple masculinities as being ‘multiple possibilities ... [and] most boys and men will take up a variety of these possibilities at different times and in different contexts’ (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998:49-50), although, of course, some will have a greater appeal and pressure than others. So being a boy is a matter of constructing oneself in, and being constructed by, the available ways and meanings of being a boy in a particular time and place, or, as Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:51) maintain, it is about negotiating a ‘set of storylines’ and ‘repertoires of action’ (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998), and there will be different storylines and practices within each school which act (as in structuration) as structures of both constraint and enablement.

### *2.5.3 A hierarchy of masculinities*

Multiple masculinities not only implies the existence of a variety of competing and frequently, contradictory, masculinities, but also their hierarchical ordering, with a dominant or hegemonic form gaining ascendancy over and above others, which are consequently marginalised (pushed to the edges) or subordinated (assaulted). Connell (1995:97) also describes a form of masculinity which is complicitous with the hegemonic/dominant form in the sense that it draws on the ‘patriarchal dividend’ and gains advantage over girls/women and other masculinities. In Chapter 9, I will explore the different forms or types of masculinity which I found in the three schools, and I will also suggest that there are a number of other ‘alternative’ or ‘personalised’ masculinities which can exist and even flourish along side the dominant form as not all boys (or men) will attempt to engage with, or even aspire to, the cultural agenda prescribed by the hegemonic/dominant form: some, of course, are simply unable to do so. The term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ was first introduced into the feminist and profeminist debate by



Carrigan et al. (1985) and has been subsequently developed by Connell (1987, 1995; 1996, 2000). By transferring Gramsci's concept of hegemony (which he originally used in the context of class relations) into the area of gender relations, Connell contributes a valuable insight of how to incorporate power into an analysis of masculinity. He argues that power is differentiated, with different meanings and versions assuming a particular dominance in certain localised sites.

Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as being 'culturally exalted' or 'idealised' (Connell, 1990:83), while Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997:119-120) call it the 'standard-bearer of what it means to be a "real" man or boy.' It is not necessarily the most common form, nor does it mean that it is always dominant, nor that it is uncontested or uniform in nature: indeed, in many ways it is fragile and insecure, and there is a constant need to maintain and defend it. However, it is the leading form of masculinity on show, claiming the highest status, and exerting the greatest influence and authority. It does not necessarily involve physical violence, but can be often underwritten by the threat of violence (Connell, 1995:77). However, most significantly, it is able to regulate thought and action by being able to define what is the norm and so, as Gramsci (see, for example, Williams, 1977; Bock, 1986) maintains, it prefers to work by implicit consent: after all, the easiest way to exercise power, and to gain advantage over others, is for the dominated to be unaware of, and therefore be complicit in, their subordination. In many ways, the less resistance, the more effective the hegemony.

Many academic papers and empirical studies use the concept of hegemonic masculinity and within the last decade it has emerged as a central reference point for understanding masculinity and male dominance [10]; indeed, Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998) argue that

the concept has gained such an ascendancy in academic writings that it has come to represent its own hegemony. However, theories evolve and develop and Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998) point out that Carrigan et al. (1985) may have been surprised to find these two words still being so widely used at the beginning of the twenty-first century in such an unproblematical, uncritical manner. The inherent weaknesses and limitations of the notion of hegemonic masculinity have been raised by a number of writers (see, for example, Donalson, 1993; Edley and Wetherall, 1995; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 1996; Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998; MacInnes, 1998; Whitehead, 1999) who suggest that there may be a need to critically examine the concept of hegemonic masculinity as an analytic tool. Whitehead (1999) argues that hegemonic masculinity can only explain so much; that its own legitimacy becomes weakened once the multiplicity of masculinities and identities are stressed; and that it is unable to reveal 'the complex patterns of inculcation and resistance which constitute everyday social action' (Whitehead 1999:58). Nevertheless, and despite Connell's recontextualisation of hegemony from macro class relations into the micro interpersonal relations in the school, I still find many of his arguments on hegemonic masculinity highly persuasive, and I regard it as a major analytical device to conceptualise masculine hierarchies in the three schools. For a fuller discussion of how I have conceptualised the boys' masculinities at the three schools, see Chapter 9 (specifically Section 9.5).

#### *2.5.4 The meanings of being a boy*

Jordan maintains that we need to make 'a clear conceptual distinction between two stages: the adoption of a gender identity and the negotiations of gender definitions' (Jordan, 1995:72). Whereas most children have adopted a gender *identity* by the age of

two (and for most people this will remain invariable throughout their life), the gender meanings associated with each category are fluid and shifting. Although the boys in my study were engaged in *making* meanings, they were still also *learning* meanings of what it is to be a boy. Connell talks about masculinity as a 'life project involving the making and remaking of identity and meaning' (cited in Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997:119), while for Gilbert and Gilbert, 'being masculine is an accomplishment which boys and men must constantly achieve in every situation they enter, a project by which they construct their life histories in particular and institutional contexts' (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 47). Boys learn to negotiate and renegotiate masculine identities in a range of social situations such as the home/family environment, school, through popular culture, and sport, and the meanings created in each context are carried over to the others.

### ***2.5.5 Masculinity as a collective project and the power of the peer group***

Although the construction of an acceptable masculine identity is a personal accomplishment, masculinities have an existence beyond the individual and are, primarily, a collective enterprise (Pattman et al., 1998; Connell, 2000; Lesko, 2000). One of the most important features of the school setting is the informal life of the pupil peer group, and its fundamental influence on the construction of masculine identities has been well documented in sociological research (see, for example, Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1996; Adler and Adler, 1998; Connolly, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Harris, 1998; Connell, 2000). Masculinities are socially organised and are a collective endeavour, and what children value most in school are opportunities for interaction with peers, for as Sutton-Smith (cited in Adler and Adler, 1998:7) maintains, 'peer interaction is not just a preparation for life, it is life itself'. Harris (1998) points out

that a child's primary goal is not so much to become a successful adult but rather a successful child and, therefore, the most important people at school are the other children for 'it is their status among their peers that matters most to them' (Harris, 1998: 241). She further argues that the peer group actually has more influence on children than their parents in the formation of their identity, of who they are now, and who they will become, and is the main conduit by which cultures are passed from one generation to another. Each peer group has its own cultural identity which can be said to refer to a 'way of life', or 'shared guidelines' (Dubbs and Whitney 1980: 27), providing boys with a series of collective meanings of what it is to be a boy. In some ways peer groups can be regarded as structures [11] representing Giddens's organised sets of rules and resources (Giddens, 1984), for they can be both enabling and constraining, and there are constant pressures on individuals to perform and behave to the expected group norms.

#### *2.5.6 Masculinity as an ongoing performance*

Drawing on the influence of symbolic interactionism (and Goffman in particular), I viewed the boys' social interactions at school as a series of performances, or dramatic encounters, that were continually being negotiated and renegotiated on a daily basis. Indeed, I wish to emphasise the performative nature of masculinity, and I have conceptualised the boys identifying and experimenting with different roles that were open to them. While I do not see these performances as subliminal, neither do I see them as being totally within each boy's control, and they were usually improvised. Moreover, they were often fashioned by the watching audience and so, in one sense, every pupil (both boys and girls) in the class was a 'player', even if they are only a spectator (Gallas, 1998).

### 2.5.7 *The connections with heterosexuality and the role of the unconscious*

Butler (1990) also refers to gender as a performance, 'a reenactment and a reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established' (Butler, 1990:140). However, this is a very different performative metaphor from the one used by Goffman (1959). For Butler, there is no pre-given, coherent identity, or, in her terms 'no 'doer behind the deed' (Butler, 1990:25), and the *appearance* of a coherent masculine self only comes into being through a sustained enactment of repetitive performances (which she calls *stylized acts*). Lovell (1996) reminds us that Butler's theories are also important for predicating that in the performance, the only 'bodies that matter' are those that are produced and classified according to the requirements of heterosexuality. Drawing on Rich's (1983) notion of 'compulsory heterosexuality' and Wittig's (1992) idea of the 'heterosexual contract', Butler contends that gender operates through a 'heterosexual matrix' which acts as a regulatory and defining 'norm' (Butler, 1993). So gender and heterosexuality are intrinsically linked, and to be a 'real' boy, you need both to feel, and to explicitly demonstrate, a desire for the opposite sex. The psychoanalytic term 'homophobia' is a persistent and pervasive theme throughout this thesis: although boys called other boys 'gay' (amongst other terms of abuse) as a means of positioning particular boys at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy, (Parker, 1996a), they also policed other boy's sexuality as a means of normalising their own masculine identities. Johnson (1996) points out that heterosexuality is a fragile concept that has to be continually worked at, because heterosexual male identity needs an internalised version of the feminine' (Johnson, 1996:183) in order to maintain the ongoing sense of difference, and so the homosexual is not only the aberrant deviant 'out there' but is also 'inside here'.



Many contemporary writers working in the field of masculinity stress the role of the unconscious (see, for example Butler, 1990, 1993; Elliott, 1992; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Frosh, 1991, 1994; Benjamin, 1995; Nayak and Kehily, 1996; Redman 1996, 1998; Redman and Mac an Ghaill, 1996, 1997). Lacan suggests that ‘the unconscious exists only in interaction with the social’ (cited in Redman and Mac an Ghaill, 1997:175) and Redman and Mac an Ghaill maintain that ‘the production and reproduction of masculinities within the school can [...] be said to be driven by unconscious processes’ (1997:175). This may well be correct. Giddens acknowledges the prevalent role of the unconscious in human social activity in his exposition of practical consciousness [12], and I am certainly not pretending to gainsay the role of the unconscious (with all its emotional subtexts) in the social actions taken by the pupils or adults in this study: undoubtedly, many stem from, and are driven by psychological configurations, and unconscious motivations and desires. However, the focus of my study is to try and *describe what is happening* through exhibited behaviours and utterances, rather than trying to offer psychological or psychoanalytical explanations for unconscious drives and motivations.

## 2.6 Embodiment

The social practices through which, and by which, the boys’ masculine identities are defined are generally described in terms of what they do with/to their bodies [13]. Within the past two decades, the body has emerged as a major focus in contemporary social theory, and is generally recognised as a social and cultural construction (see, for example, O’Neill, 1985, 1989; Turner, 1984, 1997; 2000; Shilling, 1993; Synnott, 1993; Crossley, 1996; Nespor, 1997; James et al., 1998; Gordon et al., 2000a; Prout, 2000) [14]. People

are judged by their bodies, and the people in this study can be seen as being consciously concerned about the maintenance and appearance of their bodies; they are aware of its significance, both as a personal (but unfinished) resource and as a social symbol, which communicates signs/messages about their self identity. Being in different bodies gives us different subjective experiences, and in this sense, experience can be said to be embodied (Gordon et al., 2000a:3). I am interested in discovering some of the social processes which construct and define these differences, and following Wexler (1992), I want to explore some of the ways school boys become *somebody*.

The body is thus an integral part of identity and of our biographies, for the process of making and becoming a body also involves the project of making the self (Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993). Connell (1995:52) also observes that 'bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are'; while Bourdieu (1986) argues that the body, as a social product, is the only tangible manifestation of the person, which he also sees as an unfinished entity in a constant process of becoming (Bourdieu, 1981). Some theorists are still preoccupied by the Cartesian split between the reasoning mind and the unreasoning body. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943) Sartre claims that the body is the self, and that the self is the body: Sartre's monism is not only diametrically opposed to Descartes's dualism, but his materialism also effectively extirpates Cartesian idealism, for instead of viewing 'the *mind*, by which I am what I am', Sartre asserts that the '*body* is what I immediately am' (cited in Synnott, 1993:32) [15].

In some ways, bodies can be regarded like structures, as both facilitating and constraining. Although the corporeal characteristics of the body enables human beings to

engage in social interaction and conduct, they also have to cope with the restrictions imposed by the body, its movement and communication. Connell (1995:56) maintains that: 'the body...is inescapable in the construction of masculinity; but what is inescapable is not fixed.' He argues that we should see bodies as both the 'objects and agents of practice, with the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined' (Connell, 1995:61), and he calls this 'body-reflexive practice'. In other words, active bodies can be acted upon, which is the position taken by Crossley (1996) when reviewing the work of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault. Although they appear to have radically opposed views regarding passivity and activity, and whereas Merleau-Ponty's 'body' acts, and Foucault's 'body' is acted upon, Crossley finds their position is actually commensurable, and he contends that the 'lived body' and the 'inscribed body' are really two sides of the same coin.

A body that is constructed can also be contested. All schools contain relations of (teacher) control and (pupil) resistance (Epstein and Johnson, 1998), and a key concept in this thesis is the ongoing tension between the body as an object and as agent which, in many ways, is about the struggle for the control of the boys' body [16]. Foucault (1977) argues that the child's body is the primary site of childhood: the body is central to his theory of disciplinary power and resistance, and like Goffman (1959, 1979), he recognises how bodies are shaped, invaded, classified and made meaningful (Woodward, 1997). Foucault (1977) gives us the useful notion of 'bio-power' which he sees as a form of social control which focuses on the body, and I have found this a particularly pertinent concept in relation to schools, where institutionalised practices of the official school culture involve knowledge of, and power over, individuals' gestures, movements and locations and is used to produce (or attempt to produce) 'docile' bodies, which can be



regulated and controlled, and which are generally acceptable to adults (Nespor, 1997). Lefebvre (1991) argues that as children grow older the 'spaces of the body' are replaced by the 'body in space' in which the distinction is made between the body as a generator of space and activity, and, the body as an abstract, impersonal object in a space defined by managerial/administrative practices.

Of course bodies in schools can be seen in two ways: collectively and/or individually, but the school tries to control and train both. However, the boys' bodies in my study were far away from the 'docile', passive bodies that the school attempted to produce in the classroom and assembly hall; they were full of energy and action, and, especially in the context of the playground games/activities, the boys' bodies became bodies in motion, literally and metaphorically. As in Connell's (1995) conception, they were both the objects and agents in performances and practices in which their bodies/identities became defined and appropriated as by others as 'skilful', 'fast', 'tough', 'hard' and so on.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of 'embodied' capital as a subdivision of cultural capital, Shilling (1991a, 1993) argues that it is possible to view the body as possessing a 'physical capital', the production of which refers to the ways bodies are recognised as possessing value in various social settings. They may have power, status and/or an array of distinctive symbolic forms which are used as resources of agency and influence. Remarking on the significance of the body to human agency, and the attainment and maintenance of status, he argues that:

the management of the body through time and space can be seen *as the fundamental constituent* in an individual's ability to intervene in social affairs and

to “make a difference” in the flow of daily life (Shilling 1991a:654, original italics).

Connell (1995) suggests that the physicality of the body remains central to the cultural interpretation and experience of gender. At school, boys learn to control their bodies and use them in appropriate ways that being a boy demands [17]. Sporting prowess is a key signifier of dominant masculinity, and using the body to demonstrate and perform athletic/sporting accomplishment with superior skills, strength and stamina is an important requirement for status in the majority of male peer groups in both primary and secondary schools (see, for example, Whitson, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell, 1996; Renold, 1997, 1999; Skelton, 1997, 2000; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Swain, 2000). Indeed, some opportunities in life, especially those to do with sport, are largely conditioned and determined by the shape and physical attributes of our bodies. The theme of physicality/athleticism dominates across all three schools in my study and, in many ways, all three were involved in the production of ‘physical capital’ whereby the boys’ bodies were constructed and conferred with certain symbolic values of power and status. Boys were classified and divided by their physicality both by the formal school culture and their own informal peer-group. There are also examples throughout the study where bodies are used to physically dominate and intimidate other bodies in fighting and bullying by using superior force.

The school uniform was one of the structural techniques charted by Foucault (1977) which is used to produce the disciplined and submissive, quiescent body, and in one of the schools in my study (Westmoor Abbey) the wearing of non-school uniform (or parts of non-school uniform) was a major resource for pupils in the outward/public display of resistance to school regulation. Parker (1996b) and Hargreaves (1987) have drawn

attention to the connection between commercialised consumer culture and sports which both use the body as a principal symbol of expression, and at Westmoor Abbey many of the boys (and girls) wore sports-associated clothing and training shoes. Turner (1997) reminds us that we live in a highly visual culture and that the eye has become the dominant organ: 'we consume in order to consume, and what we consume is the sign itself' (Turner, 1997:105). The body is sign-bearing and sign-wearing and also a producer of signs, and the clothes that we choose to wear make a highly visible statement of how we wish to present ourselves to the world; who we think we are, or who we would like to be (Goffman, 1959): in essence, for the boys at this particular school, their clothing was used to symbolise a way of life and a way of being.

## **2.7 Power**

As Edley and Wetherell (1996) state, any acceptable theory of masculinity will have the concept of power at its centre, and I have already, briefly, looked at Connell's appropriation of Gramsci's notion of hegemony (see Section 2.5.3) which has been influential in recent empirical studies. Like the concept of identity, power is notoriously difficult to define, and there is little agreement on either what it is or how it is constituted (Skelton, 2001); indeed some writers have argued that we should give up any attempts to search for any unifying definition (Lukes, 1986; Deem, 1994). Connell (1987) argues that power is multiple and that force is one important component. It is certainly omnipresent in both macro and micro relationships and contexts, and of course it has already made its appearance throughout this chapter in many different forms and guises: in social practices and interactions, in agency, enablement, constraint, sanctions, resistance, identities, bodies and so on. Power in school is complex; at times visible, at

times hidden, and relations of power can shift quickly between centres and margins. Although the most overt expression of power at school is represented by the teachers, and invested in them by the hierarchical nature of the official school organisation, teachers may find themselves in subordinate positions against individual pupils, collective groups in classes, other teachers, parents, OFSTED inspectors and so. A pupil can find themselves powerful in the context of the playground, and then five minutes later marginalised in the classroom, and sometimes these positions can work the other way round.

Some of my influences and understandings of power are drawn from Foucault (1977), especially when trying to understand how power works in the *official* school setting. The central section of *Discipline and Punish* is entitled 'The means of correct training', and I have already mentioned (see Section 2.6) how Foucault's theories are applied in the production of 'docile bodies' [18]. Foucault views power as being decentred and exercised from 'within' rather than from 'above': in Foucault's phrase, power is 'exercised through its invisibility' in its 'capillary from' and internalised within the practices of everyday life, even at the most microscopic levels. The key aspects of power in schools are techniques of discipline and surveillance, and they operate within pupils and teachers through internalised routines and practices of regulation, examination, classification and normalisation (Foucault, 1977). It also involves the specified enclosing and control of space (see Section 3.2.5) which, as Giddens (1982) points out, resembles the prison. Foucault also contends that power can be productive as well as repressive, and it is not always inevitable, unalterable or unchanging (Faith, 1994); indeed, a necessary and integral part of the power equation is resistance, for without resistance there would be no power relations but only obedience.

Before I leave Foucault, I also want to look briefly at his notion of 'discourse' which needs to be acknowledged and discussed in any study of power. Francis (2000:19) defines 'discourse' as 'patterns of language that describe and position people in different ways'; that is, our beliefs and knowledge, the ways that we come to think about, and are able to talk about, the world are shaped by the discourses that circulate around us. Although there will often be a dominant or hegemonic discourse, there will also usually be a combination of other contradictory discourses which may be either marginalised, emergent or challenging. In some ways discourses are analogous to Gilbert and Gilbert's 'storylines' and 'repertoires of action' which mean that the boys' constructions of identity are shaped and formed by those meanings and practices circulating within each school, although poststructuralists see discourses as actually constituting identity. For the purposes of this study I am primarily using discourse in the wider and adjectival sense to allow me to discuss and analyse the series of ideas and meanings which have coalesced around the phrase 'boys underachievement' (see Section 1.3).

Although I wish to draw on parts of the Foucauldian framework (particularly the systems of discipline/surveillance), I am not in accord with everything that he says, and I have found myself needing to look elsewhere for my analysis of power in school relations: for instance, power may well be everywhere, and will be interiorised, but this does not mean that it is necessarily invisible to those who exercise it, or to those who are exercised by it. Foucault is useful and yet, unlike myself, he is not interested in people who 'are simply the conduits through which power operates' (Layder, 1994:102-103). He has no gender theory at all, and he also completely overlooks, or is uninterested in, situated interaction as a dimension of meaning.

However, I have also found the theories of symbolic interactionism inadequate to deal with theories of power: indeed, the tendency to miss, or ignore, the wider, less easily observable features of cultural, social and political power is a persistent weakness in the credibility of its analysis. Moreover, as Francis (2000) points out, economic and physical power can also have a profound influence on people's lives and can, therefore, be analysed in their own right, and some elements of this power can be said to come from above. As my study is concerned with human interaction occurring 'within circumstances not of their own choosing', I have found myself returning to Giddens who I find particularly germane when trying to understand how power works in the school setting. In fact, his account of social practices should be logically preceded by an analysis of the connection between agency and power, because he contends that the whole notion of action is logically bound up with the notion of power, which is a present feature inherent in every form of human interaction (and therefore in structures as well). Power, for Giddens (1984), is a means of getting things done, and of being able to do: in other words, a capability for human beings to intervene in a situation, or series of events, and be able to alter their course (Giddens, 1976). Giddens sees power as relational for my power over you is dependent upon the power that you have over me. He also points out that power in interaction should be understood as the resources and/or strategies the actors possess, and are able to bring and use in a situation to influence or alter its course and/or the behaviour of others involved. These may use the concept of status (or authority), physical force and other symbolic signifiers (such as athleticism, clothing etc), and the extent of a person's influence is restricted by the resources at their disposal (and the strategies they are able to employ), and these will, obviously, vary at different times and in different contexts.

## *2.8 Conclusions*

This chapter has set out to locate a series of eclectic theoretical frameworks and conceptual terms so that I can introduce a conceptual language to describe and understand how the boys in my study construct, negotiate and perform their masculine identities within the microcultural world of the three schools. I began by looking at the theory of Giddens's structuration which provides a synthesis between human agency and wider structural relations. The pupils are 'skilled and knowledgeable agents' although their knowledge and agency is always limited by unacknowledged conditions and circumstances. The theories of symbolic interactionism seem particularly apposite to the study of micro interactions of pupil cultures, as seen from the pupils' point of view. From these, I have an understanding that social agents act on the basis of meanings and understandings that arise through the interactions with others within the context of the school. My study is concerned with emerging identities which I understand to be an incomplete, contradictory, ongoing life project that are constructed with enduring struggle, but I have retained the idea of a central 'core' identity, a kernel to which different identities append themselves to leaving some residual trace. I am indebted to the feminist-inspired theories of masculinity which see masculinities as being socially constructed, negotiated and performed within the structure of gender relations. They are hierarchical with one dominant form often gaining ascendancy. The social process of embodiment forms a major part of this study and is also viewed as an constituent part of identity: bodies are viewed as both active and acted upon, and there is a struggle for, or contestation over, the control of the body between the school and the individual pupils. Finally, I have looked at the concept of power which is ever-present in both macro and

micro contexts. I am using Foucault's concept of disciplinary power working within rather than from above which I find has a particular resonance when applied to the institution of the official school, but I also see power as the embodiment of resources which actors are able to draw on to alter the course of events during face-to-face interactions.

In the next chapter I look at the institution of the school, which is viewed as a major site in the construction and performance of masculinities. I also consider the concept of 'childhood' and 'the child', and discuss a number of issues that arise from researching young children in the school setting. Finally, I outline my definition of what constitutes the term 'ethnography'.

### Footnotes

[1] In his conceptualisation of structure Giddens (1987) makes an analogy with Saussure's classic discussion of the structural qualities of language. The system of language (*langue*) is abstract and only exists and functions as a social phenomenon through individual acts of speech (*parole*). The rules are only understood and used implicitly without needing to be continually tangible. Indeed, it can be argued that, in many ways, structuration is an appropriation and extension of Saussure's semiological/linguistic theory.

[2]. Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977) attempts to identify the structural and action features of the cultural world of a group of 12 working class boys in a secondary school called Hammertown. Although Willis takes the orthodox Marxist view that the boys are



disadvantaged by their position within the structures of a capitalist society, he also demonstrates ways that the boys have agency to choose how to conduct their lives within this structural context. P. Jones (1993) also argues that the fact that the boys seemingly conspire in their own downfall by ending up in the ennui of dead-end factory jobs does not diminish the importance of human agency; it is not a structurally-created, pre-determined inevitability, but is, in many respects, a path chosen by the boys themselves based on their own personal theories about their world. As Woods (1990) says, Willis's theory is more about cultural production rather than reaction and reproduction.

[3] In a personal communication (1.5.01), Willis said that although he broadly agreed with Giddens's interpretation, he thought that Giddens had failed to sufficiently emphasise the Marxist strand in his work.

[4] Symbolic interactionism is an American branch of Action theory which established itself in Europe on the foundations of Kantian idealism (Filmer et al., 1998). In fact Miller and Dingwall (1997) point out that its underlying propositions can actually be traced back to the Stoics two thousands years before: that is, the understanding of our own actions comes from interpreting the responses of others; and our actions are designed in regard to our expected responses of others.

[5] (See, for example, Denzin, 1991b, 1991c; Manning, 1991; Fontana, 1992, 1993; Dawson and Prus, 1993a, 1993b, 1995; Katovich, 1993; Richadson, 1993; Schmitt, 1993; Best, 1995; Charmz, 1995; Castellani, 1999).

[6] See, also, the poststructuralist dialogue over agency/identity between Jones (1997) and Davies (1997).

[7] Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998) point out that many of these were influenced, but also constrained, by the theories of Talcott Parsons,

[8] Thorne (1993:3) points out that this always implies the more powerful adult socialising the less powerful child, although as she says, children are not without power or agency. However, I do not wish to argue that socialisation does not play any part in the formation of identity. Indeed, there are times and places when this process may be highly influential.

[9] These binary oppositions can be traced back to the Cartesian distinction between mind and body which was a key constituent of the hegemonic power of Enlightenment rationalism. The first statement was privileged over the second which therefore became subordinated (Guttermann 1994; Rattansi 1996): mind/body; rationality/irrationality; reason/emotion; culture/nature; public/private; natural/unnatural; male/female and so forth. In this way, we can see how these distinctions have come to justify and sustain a gender order that subordinates women and marginalises particular masculinities (Diamond and Quinby 1988; Seidler 1991).

[10] (See, for example, Connell 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Parker 1996a; Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997; Renold 1997, 1999; Skelton 1997; Benjamin, 1998, 2001; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; D. Brown, 1999; Martino 1999; Light and Kirk, 2000; Swain, 2000).

[11] Mac an Ghail (1994; 1996) points out that peer groups are used as a kind of 'institutional infrastructure'.

[12] Giddens views human beings as having two distinct levels of consciousness, or awareness, which effect the way people actually behave. First there is *practical consciousness* which is linked to the unconscious knowledge of 'how to go on' and 'do things' in an automatic way, which people are only tacitly aware of, and use in their everyday social behaviour, knowing how to act and what to do next. They often find it difficult to articulate this knowledge, and thus much day-to-day conduct occurs without being directly motivated. Then there is *discursive consciousness* which refers to human beings ability to comment and rationalise on their activities, to describe and discuss their behaviour.

[13] It is important to remember that bodies are not merely simple objects encased in skin but are inscribed with social markers like age, gender, ethnicity/race and social class

[14] Light and Kirk (2000) point out that, given the implicit recognition of the body in the social theories of such writers as Durkheim (1976), Goffman (1959), Marx (1958) and Mauss (1973), the increasing interest in the body over the past two decades might be more accurately described as the 're-emergence' rather than as the 'discovery'.

[15] Turner (2000) also mentions the important influence of Spinoza in theories of the body. He writes that the Cartesian theories emphasise not only individualism but command over the environment, and the dominance of cognitive faculties. In contrast,

Spinoza, emphasises parallelism where the mind and body are interconnected but also exist within other beings in the environment.

[16] Gordon et al, (2000a) describe the ongoing negotiations between the school and the pupils as a process of agency and control.

[17] Some psychoanalytically orientated writers suggest that boys (and men) see the body as something to be mastered rather than be enjoyed (Segal, 1990), while Frosh (1997:72) maintains that boys (and men) try to make their body 'the instrument of the will, to be honed and worked upon so that it will be able to achieve what it expected of it'.

[18] Interestingly, the term 'docile' has its own educational association as it comes from the Latin *docilis* which means 'teachable' (Hoskin, 1990:30).

## Chapter 3      *Researching children at school*

### *3.1 Introduction*

This chapter is divided into four main sections. It begins by considering the school as an institution where this research is located. Although schools can be sites of social change and emancipation, I am regarding them, essentially, as regulatory institutions which are dominated by Foucauldian concepts of discipline (Foucault, 1977) and ever increasing methods of public and within-school surveillance. Further, I maintain that they are infused by the discourse of corporate management with its twin catch phrases of ‘school effectiveness’ and ‘raising standards’. A main argument in this chapter is that schools are key sites in the construction and formation of masculinities, for these are not only constructed in relation to femininities and other masculinities, but also in relation to schooling. I identify four key sites of ‘masculine practices’: management, teacher-pupil relations, the curriculum, and sport/games. My contention is that, although schools are located within wider structures, local school practices and ‘storylines’ can make a significant difference to the way children experience their lives at school. The second section explores the notion of ‘childhood’ and ‘the child’ which are viewed as a transitory and historical category which have been constructed and imposed by adults. In this study children are perceived to be knowledgeable and articulate social actors who are active constructors of meaning. The research is, therefore, approached from the ‘child’s standpoint’ with understandings of what it means to be a boy in a particular school at a particular time which are based on, and mediated through, the children’s own values and experiences as represented by them in interviews. The third section raises empirical issues of what it means to be an adult researcher in a junior school. I look at power

relationships between the researcher and the children; the role and responsibilities of the researcher; and ethical questions of confidentiality and informed consent. The fourth section considers the processes involved in *doing* ethnography: it discusses the concept of ethnography, and states how the term ‘ethnographic-study’ is defined in this thesis.

### **3.2 *The school***

#### **3.2.1 *The school as a site***

Boys negotiate and renegotiate masculine identities in a range of social and cultural situations such as families, neighbourhoods, schools, sport, popular media-culture, commodified style cultures [1], labour markets and so on, and each of these sites offers boys ways of constructing masculinities, and possibilities for forming views of themselves and relations with others. The meanings, ideas, attitudes and beliefs that are generated in each area are carried over to the others (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998), but this study is set in the specific context of the school, and my primary question is how do *school* processes contribute to, and help form, young boys masculine identities in their own right. Many researchers writing on adolescent boys in the secondary school have played down the role of schooling in the formation of masculinities for men (see, for example, Walker, 1988; Connell, 1989). Indeed, for Connell (1989:301) the ‘childhood family, the adult workplace or sexual relationships (including marriage)’ are more important influences, but, as Skelton (2001) persuasively points out, these last two areas have far less immediate relevance for 10-11 year olds, and so it is possible to conclude that the school plays a more prominent role in the construction of identity for these young boys. All schools are thoroughly gendered in their organisations and practices and may be described as a ‘masculinity factory’ (Heward, 1996:39). This thesis examines the

interplay of schooling and masculinity, and a main argument is that the official and unofficial processes, and the physical and material spaces of the school, are key areas in which masculinities (and femininities) are mediated and lived out.

There has been a growing body of research into the effects and impact of masculinities in educational settings [2]. These texts have provided us with a series of well-argued theoretical frameworks which allow us to understand and explore both how masculinities suffuse school regimes, and, recognise how schooling not only *reproduces* but also *produces* gender identities, although not always in ways that are either straightforward or transparent.

### *3.2.2 The discourse of competitive corporate management*

The central tenet of the postwar educational consensus was that the function of the education system was for the development of economic growth, to regulate and maintain the *status quo*, and to produce citizens fit to take their place in society; but there has also been a movement which emphasises schooling's role to deliver emancipation and produce social change towards a fairer, more equitable society (see Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Gordon et al., 2000a) [3]. These expectations can overlap and be contradictory, but in recent years there has been a fundamental restructuring of English state schooling, and in the New Right agenda the school has found itself located and incorporated into a competitive market place (Power and Whitty, 1999) [4] [5]. Indeed, in 1988, Kenneth Baker, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, was heard to utter in a conference that 'the age of egalitarianism is now over' (referred to by Arnot, 1991:457). When I came into teaching in 1979, my first school was still dominated by

the child-centred discourses of the late 1960s-late 1970s [6]. There was an ideological language which Alexander (1988:148) refers to as 'primaryspeak', and it was used as a power base for heads and advisors. It exerted a subtle but irresistible pressure, and you needed to learn and use its slogans and shibboleths in order gain legitimacy and, dare I say, promotion. Some of the most salient pedagogic terms were (in alphabetical order): 'activities'; 'apprenticeship'; 'choice'; 'cooperation'; 'curiosity'; 'developmental'; 'display'; 'facilitator'; 'fascination'; 'flexibility'; 'freedom'; 'group-work'; 'growth'; 'in-depth'; 'integrated-day'; 'natural'; 'nurturing'; 'Piaget'; 'potential'; 'progress'; 'quality'; 'stage-of-development'; 'understanding'; 'workshop'.

Twenty years later and schools are now pervaded by an alternative and powerful discourse of competitive corporate management. The dominant educational phrases of the late-1990s-early twenty-first century are 'school effectiveness', and 'raising school standards' (Weiner et al., 1997) which have their origins in the New Right movement that came to the fore with the election of the Thatcher government in 1979. Again, it is perhaps interesting to take a closer examination at some of the other terms and phrases that have infiltrated into the language of education and schooling, taking note of the 'bellicose' language and imagery (Raphael Reed, 1998). For example (and again in alphabetical order): 'achievement'; 'accountability'; 'action-zones'; 'assessment'; 'attainment'; 'best-practice'; 'boys'-underachievement'; 'comparisons'; 'competition'; 'effectiveness'; 'examinations'; 'hit squads'; 'improvement'; 'inspection'; 'measurement'; 'monitoring'; 'National Curriculum'; 'OFSTED'; 'outcomes'; 'performance'; 'performance-related-pay'; 'planning'; 'reward/punishment'; 'results'; 'rigorous'; 'SATs'; 'setting'; 'shame-and-blame'; 'standards'; 'streaming'; 'target-setting'; 'testing'; '3-Rs'; 'whole-class-teaching'; 'whole-school-approach'; 'zero



tolerance'. In some ways, it is not so much whether either of these competing discursive fields is representative of an ideology that is somehow 'better' or 'worse' for the education of pupils, for they are linked to knowledge/power (Foucault, 1980), which means that the people with influence (such as the government, inspectorate and so forth), have the power to make them appear to be right and, more importantly, have the power to impose them and attempt to make them happen [7].

Under the current discourses of 'school effectiveness' and 'raising standards', Pollard and Filer (1999) point out that the assumption is that if standards are to rise the curriculum must be taught more effectively, and there is little attempt to engage with pupils as learners *per se*. Children's own experiences and understandings become irrelevant, except in so far as they may affect outcomes (Mayall, 1999). Indeed, successive governments seem to hold a simple and unproblematic notion of 'the pupil' which are based on implied assumptions of passivity. All the talk is of 'better teaching' and a 'better delivery of the curriculum', and in this account the pupil is like a commodity with a relative value. Pollard and Filer (1999) contend that 'education... is something which is done *to* children, not *with* children, and still less *by* children' (Pollard and Filer, 1999:21).

### ***3.2.3 Discipline and surveillance***

Foucault (1977) argues that the appearance of modern institutions such as the prison, hospital, factory and school coincided with a significant transition in the fields of power. In prison, former public displays of executions, torture, and other direct markings of the body, were replaced with incarceration. For Foucault, the key aspects of prison were

discipline and surveillance, and these became pervasive within the other organised institutions, such as schools, where there developed a careful control of every aspect of life. The objective of these techniques of power is to produce compliant, 'docile bodies', and, indeed, the child's body became the primary site of childhood (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000).

Although disciplinary power is 'exercised through its invisibility' (Foucault, 1977:187), structures of surveillance are required to ensure that individuals become visible by being constantly monitored and observed within specified, organised, enclosed areas of space and time. Rather than subjecting individuals to specific physical punishments, continuous observation means that the principles of surveillance become internalised. The idealised form of physical layout is Bentham's plan of the all-seeing Panopticon, and as Foucault writes, 'the perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly' (Foucault: 1977:173).

For Bernstein (1996), schools are, essentially, regulatory institutions which attempt to control pupils, and I wish to argue that they utilise Foucauldian techniques of discipline, surveillance, classification and normalisation (Foucault, 1977). Children are watched, judged, measured, described, compared, trained, corrected, examined and classified almost as soon as they step into the classroom on their first day, as they 'learn' to become pupils. Formalised assessments and on-going testing now begin at the age of four, and continue throughout a child's school life at regular intervals like an educational assembly line.

The discipline/surveillance relation is evident throughout using techniques of spatialisation, control of activity, hierarchies, and normalising judgements. Spatialisation limits and shapes what can be done in certain spaces, and means that pupils are taught within confined areas where everyone has to be visible, is (usually) assigned a place, and keeps to it; activities are prescribed and controlled by being timetabled; hierarchies are created whereby each level watches over the lower ranks; and normalising and comparative judgements are made if an individual deviates from the norm, which is a far more subtle use of power that defines and classifies the individual as not only bad, but also as abnormal: a transgressor from the norm.

However, I do not view teachers as agents of the state, with a sole interest in regulation and control, and of course, given the fact that there are many pupils for every one teacher, it is hardly surprising that issues of surveillance and control feature so highly in teacher cultures. Moreover, do not let us forget that control and surveillance also works as a two-way process: the teachers' gaze falls on the pupils; the pupils gaze at the teachers; and both parties gaze at their own groups. Teachers, themselves, are also subjected to discipline and increasing amounts of state regulation (in the form of the National Curriculum, SATs, league tables and LEA and OFSTED inspections) and peer surveillance.

### *3.2.4 The formal/official and informal/unofficial school cultures*

Connell (1989) and Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1996) refer to schools as acting as 'masculinity-making devices', for they teach boys about how to be male and how to become a man, and about who to be and what to value. They learn that there are a

number of different, and often competing ways of being a boy, and that some are more valued and prestigious, and more powerful than others (Kenway and Willis, 1998). I have already alluded to the fact children are extremely active in the construction, negotiation and performance of their lives both inside the school building and in the playground. The pupils are often perfectly capable of negotiating, challenging or ignoring school attempts to regulate and control them; indeed a constituent of pupil cultures is often concerned with obstructing and undermining teachers' disciplinary powers, and thus 'relations of control and resistance are inscribed in all other social relations of schooling' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998:113). However, we must also remember that while they are not fulfilling developmental models as passive subjects enacting out ascribed roles, they still act within the specific historical, economic and cultural context of their society in which they find themselves. Moreover, schools themselves also exist within their own structural contexts, including the structure of the UK education system, and these pressures have a profound influence on the school's policies and organisations, as 'macro' interactions are enacted on the 'micro' stage.

During my field work I differentiated between the formal/official and the informal/unofficial cultures of the school, which have also been identified (amongst others) by Connell et al. (1982), Pollard (1985) and Gordon et al. (2000a), although they define them in slightly different ways. The formal school culture is laid out in documents of the school and state, and includes the teaching and learning, the pedagogy, the disciplinary apparatus, and the policy/organisational and administrative structures. The informal school culture is not intended to be in binary opposition, for it is different from, rather than a reaction to, and is in a continual negotiation with, the formal school culture. Although it also has its own particular hierarchy, rules and criteria of evaluation and

judgement, and many of its parameters are set by the formal regime, it has a whole life and meaning all of its own: it includes not only the relations and interactions between the pupils, but also the informal relations between pupils and teachers outside of the instructional relationship. Although it is beyond the scope of my interest in this study, it also includes relations between teacher and teacher and between pupils, teachers and other groups in the school such as support staff of various types and descriptions (see Gordon et al., 2000a). As my understandings developed, I also began to incorporate the physical/material layer of the school into my conceptual analysis, which refers to the spatiality and the material embodiment, including space, time and action (see below). These three layers are intertwined in everyday school life and are not fixed but, rather, messy and shifting. The distinctions between them are analytical, and classifying and differentiating between these layers allowed me to understand and analyse a range of processes and practices involving the ways that boys constructed their masculinities.

### *3.2.5 Space and time*

In order to understand the life of a 10-11 year old boy at school we need to attempt to understand some of the processes that organise their bodies in space and time. Gordon et al. (2000a) point out that the physical space of the school, and the spatiality of social life, have been largely neglected in educational research. They argue that the concept of space tends to be used metaphorically rather than analytically, but Massey (1993:143) maintains that space is 'one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualise the world'. Pupils are positioned in multiple ways in schools, and their relations are not merely abstract relations but are enacted by bodies in space. Spaces limit and shape what

is being done in them, but also are shaped by these same activities, and Gordon et al. (2000a) refer to these processes as *spatial praxis*, that is action and practice.

As we have already seen with Foucault's concept of spatialisation (see Section 3.2.3), the capability of controlling space is an important constituent of power (Giddens, 1979). Shilling (1991b) argues that space in schools is used as a resource to perpetuate adult domination over pupils, and notions of hierarchy are integrated in the division and compartmentalisation of the school space into areas of teaching, administration and recreation. School rules and regulations prescribe what is and what is not allowed in school which includes how bodies are to behave, and how they are allowed move and act in space (Nespor, 1997). For instance, pupils are taught to sit quietly and sit still, and to put their hand up when they wish to ask a question; to line up in an orderly manner (usually in a single file, and sometimes in a prescribed order); to control their bowels and bladders; how to walk along the corridor; and how and when to eat in a narrowly prescribed time and space.

Although pupils and teachers spend the majority of their time sharing the same space, some spaces are more open than others, and different social groups have different access to particular spaces. Opportunities to find private space for pupils is rare, as space in school is generally strictly controlled, regulated and surveyed, although, as I have stated, restrictions can also be challenged or ignored by the pupils. Pupils are usually not allowed into the school building at breaktime, and certain rooms are forbidden to them such as staff rooms, adult toilets, gym cupboards etc. However, breaktimes are times and spaces when pupils can have greater freedom and autonomy, and spaces (which are usually outside the school building) can seem more open and offer more possibilities for

expression and movement. During breaktime at the three schools in this study different groups of pupils could be seen engaged in different activities which took place in different spaces: for example, some played football on the playground, some sat/stood and talked or watched, some were found in the libraries and/or computer rooms. Thus space is used differently by different individuals. I also noticed that there was a correlation between those pupils who were most active and those who were dominant in the pupil groupings, and these pupils also had a tendency to claim more space than those on the margins.

Like space, time in schools is also a variable to be managed, regulated and controlled. Schools stipulate when the school day starts and ends, when the pupils are supposed to enter and leave the classroom, the times of assembly, breaktimes and lunchtimes and so on. Movement is mapped out and controlled at specific times: pupils and teachers have to be at certain points in space at prescribed moments of time. Massey (1993) proposes that time and space are not discrete entities but form an amalgamated fourth dimension of space-time. In schools time and space are interconnected in time-space paths, and pupils follow these pathways which become routinised through repetition. Giddens (1985) writes that mapping pupils' daily time-space paths is a useful topological device for recording spatial praxis, and these are also 'descriptions of how space is socially organised for use' (Gordon et al., 2000a:148).

### ***3.2.6 Masculinising practices***

Connell (1996) maintains that gender structures in society designate certain patterns of conduct as 'masculine' or 'feminine', and that as these patterns exist at both individual

and collective levels, masculinities can be seen being defined and sustained in institutions such as schools. For Connell (1996:213), 'gender is embedded in the institutional arrangements by which a school functions,' which Kessler et al. (1985) refer to as the school's *gender regime*:

This may be defined as the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labor (sic) within the institution. The gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition. It can be changed deliberately or otherwise, but is no less powerful in its effects on pupils for that. It confronts them as a social fact, which they have to come to terms with somehow (Kessler et al., 1985:42).

Schools are inevitably hierarchical and create and sustain relations of domination and subordination; each orders certain practices in terms of power and prestige as it defines its own gender regime. Indeed, a main argument in this thesis is that, although schools are located and shaped by specific socio-cultural, politico-economic and historical conditions, individual personnel, reproduced rules, routines and expectations, and the school's own utilisation of resources and space will all have a profound impact, and can make a substantive difference, to the way young boys (and girls) live/experience their lives at school. If we are to understand how masculinities are constructed in the school setting, we need to examine how particular sets of practices and the available storylines are articulated and related to gender relations, and we will find that some are more obvious and conspicuous than others. Between them, Connell (1996) and Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) site four key areas of 'masculinising practices': management and policy/organisational practices, including discipline; teacher and pupil relations; the curriculum; and sport/games.



School policies and organisation, and the management practices which constitute it, are a key part of the gender regime and are visible in such practices as academic competition and hierarchy, constant testing, team games, strict discipline, a strict code of dress/uniform, divisions of labour and patterns of authority and so on. The relations between teachers and pupils have been thoroughly documented: teachers make gender distinction a central element of pupil identity, and it has been shown how they are similar to parents in that they tend to treat boys and girls according to gendered stereotypes (see Alloway, 1995). There is a tendency for the questions they ask, the manner of their responses, the systems they use for rewards and sanctions to be influenced by assumptions about gender differences. For instance, Walkerdine (1989) shows how teachers are more likely to attribute boys' academic success to their natural ability but girls' to hard work, and Cohen (1998) has traced the history of this predilection back to the seventeenth century. Moreover, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1996) also point out how styles of teaching are also affected by connections of masculinity with power, authority and competence, and they argue that 'signs of weakness' are often associated with femininity. The curriculum itself is the product of particular political developments which need to be located historically, and with regard to particular interest groups and ideologies. Many writers (see, for example, Connell, 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996; and Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Gordon et al., 2000a) have pointed out that the curriculum can be seen as a direct producer of masculinities. With its institutionalised patterns of knowledge, the curriculum is associated with the Foucauldian disciplinary techniques of hierarchical (academic) classification, normalising judgements and the examination, and masculinities emerge through the pupils' relationship with it. The curriculum offers boys a resource to develop their masculinity through a range of responses to it (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 1996), and while some are able to use it to

establish status through teacher approval and test results, some boys actively resist school learning and expectations, and look for alternative resources of prestige to validate their masculine identities. A fourth site is sport/games which has a great significance in the cultural life of many schools, engaging the school population as a whole in the 'celebration and reproduction of the dominant codes of gender' (Connell 1996:217). School sport is not meant to be some kind of innocent pastime, but is used to create a 'top dog' model of masculinity which many boys try to aim for and live up to (Salisbury and Jackson 1996:205), and, typically, top sporty boys have a higher status, particularly in the informal peer group [8].

Of course, the main gaze of this thesis is actually the informal life of the peer group. This is one of the most important features of school as a social setting, for peer-group cultures are also 'agents' in the making of masculinities. The peer milieu has its own gender order, as pupils try to define, negotiate, renegotiate, perform, and establish their own masculine identities. This site will be considered and explored in greater detail in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

### ***3.3 Children and childhood***

Children's voices are heard through cultural constructions of childhood, and so we also need to pay attention to the concept of childhood as well as to the children themselves. Attitudes to children, and ideas about childhood, have changed significantly over the centuries and many social scientists and historians now regard childhood as a shifting social, or historical, construction rather than something natural or innate (see, for example, Pollack, 1983; James and Prout, 1990; Burman, 1992, 1995; James, 1995;

Jenks, 1996; Mayall, 1996, 1999; Gittens, 1998; James et al., 1998; Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000). Aries (1973) argues that in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist: at about the ages of 5-7 children were absorbed into the world of the adults and were dressed and pictorially represented as miniature adults; from then on they could be 'schooled, worked, married, imprisoned and hanged' (Aldrich, 1982:32). After the seventeenth century, a different notion of childhood began to develop and the Czech educator, Comenius, was already proposing a full education for every child to the age of twelve. In *Emile*, (1762) Rousseau extended childhood until the age of 15 and, certainly for boys, he recommended a course of non-intervention for the first twelve years where childhood could 'ripen'. Theories and discourses of 'children as innocent', 'children in need of protection', and of 'the uncivilised child who need to be controlled' all meant that children were, and indeed still are, placed in schools 'for their best interests' (see, Kitzinger, 1990; Gittens, 1998; Pollard and Filer, 1999).

The domination of twentieth-century discourses, which come from developmental psychology based on biological models, has tended to maintain the subordination of children, and there has been a reluctance to give children a voice in the educational process (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000). Indeed, the main interest has focused on what happens to them, rather than on what they do and say (Alldred, 1988). Ideas from behaviourist psychology have reiterated that the most effective learning is achieved through constant reinforcement, while socialisation theories believed that children should be inducted into adult norms and learn adult skills in order to 'grow up' and 'settle down'.

It is not my purpose to recite the different conceptions of 'childhood' or 'the child' but to highlight that they need to be viewed as a transitory social and historical category which has been constructed and imposed by adults. Debates about childhood are obfuscated by power relations in which adults have power over children, and are adult-centred in the sense that children are conceptualised in terms of the impact they make on adults, and not as living human beings in their own right. Moreover, they tend to preserve the construction of childhood, not as a stage of development in its own right, but as a rehearsal for adult life which requires controlled forms of socialisation, so as Qvortrup (1987) says, children are constructed like incomplete adults or 'human becomings', rather than human beings. The experiences of the child living in the social world 'as a child' has often been ignored: James et al., (1998:207) argue that children should be understood in their own right, 'as a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences'. They propose an 'epistemological break' with the past, whereby 'new sociological approaches to the study of childhood move to study real children or the experiences of being a child' (James et al., 1998:208). Indeed, this study, which is situated in micro-childhood cultures, seeks to break away from the myths surrounding traditional conceptions of childhood: like Opie and Opie (1977) and Thorne (1987), I wish to endorse the 'conceptual autonomy' of children, and the intention is to ground my understanding of children from their own experience, and view them as active meaning-makers of social reality and their own worlds, and where 'their interactions are not preparations for life, they are life itself' (Thorne, 1993:3).

### ***3.4 Researching children***

#### ***3.4.1 From the children's standpoint***

Epstein (1993) maintains that although children occupy a subordinate position at school, and have relatively limited powers, they are far from powerless, and have the ability to resist and/or intervene in situations or events and be able to alter their course (Giddens, 1976). Nevertheless, school is a compulsory institution and they have no choice but to attend, nor little say in curricula content. That children are a marginalised group with little power has been increasingly recognised over recent years (most significantly in the Children Act, 1989). It has also led to some researchers to argue that children should be given a greater voice and empowerment, and that research into childhood and children's cultures should be based on the 'children's own standpoint' (Alanen, 1994). This has been adopted by Alanen (see, also Oakley, 1994 and Burman, 1995) from the feminist-standpoint epistemology of such writers as Harding (1986) and Smith (1987) who have taken the methodological approach of understanding women from their own social and cultural experiences and applied it to the understanding of children. It means not only recording children's descriptions of their experiences, but also eliciting their interpretations and knowledge of what they think it means to be a child at this particular time and in this particular place. However, as the children are making history, 'not in circumstances of their own choosing', the research process needs to develop a child standpoint which also engages with the societal processes through the child's understandings of their own experiences. In other words, we need to explore and analyse children's own understandings of what it means, for them, to be a child and *do* child/pupil; but we also need a theoretical appreciation of the wider structures that shape and condition the child's agency. Connolly (1997) also argues that the children's voices

will always be expressed through the medium of the researcher, and so the most important factor in shaping the way the data on children is collected, analysed and presented is the researcher's own values and assumptions of children and childhood. The aim then is to develop a synthesis between the child's standpoint and the adult researcher's understanding of the child's social position.

As Alldred (1998) contends, notions such as entering 'the child's world' (Mandell, 1986, 1991) and/or interacting 'with children in their perspective' (Mandell, 1991) imply that adults and children inhabit separate social spaces. This approach is realist and, implicitly, objectivist with the idea that it is possible to enter the culture, observe it and report on it, whilst leaving it undisturbed and unaltered. It is also in opposition to Giddens (Cassell, 1993) who argues that all social research produces a 'double hermeneutic' whereby a researcher's own conceptual theories and definitions of 'what is going on' come, unavoidably, to be interpreted and appropriated by the very social actors who are being investigated. Moreover, some researchers such as Corsaro (1981) present their work as a straightforward portrayal of the children's culture with the assumption that the reader will use the researcher's own perspective as the basis for knowledge. However, as I have argued above, we need to examine adult conceptions alongside, and in relation to, the observations that are made, for the descriptions in this thesis are going to be, inevitably, rendered through the lens of my own conceptions, values and terms.

### ***3.4.2 Roles and power relationships***

An issue for researchers working in the role of participating in children's cultures is how to approach and manage the conventional adult-child relationship. In her discussion on

'the least adult' role Mandell (1988:435) contends that 'the researcher [can] suspend all adult-like characteristics except size', and Goode, (1986) and Waksler, (1986) also maintain that full adult participation is possible, and that all aspects of adult superiority can be ignored except the physical. However, Corsaro (1985) argues that signifiers of adult age and authority mean that adult participation in children's cultures can only ever be partial. Some researchers like Davies (1989) appear to try and actually become a child but this was not my intention: I never attempted to try and be 'like one of them' for of course I could not: simply being an adult meant an unequal, dichotomous distribution of power, and I knew, and they knew, that I was different and apart. Although I am sympathetic to Mandell's (1988) and Epstein's (1998b) idea of the 'least adult role' [9], I was conscious that I was still (very obviously) an adult with my age, height, deeper voice, and my clothes and, indeed, Epstein herself points up the impossibility of maintaining such a position beyond a certain point. My intention was to mix in with the informal pupil culture, but I did not want to pretend to be like the children by dressing or acting like the children, but nor did I want to position myself outside and (sometimes) against their culture by emulating the dress and/or the behaviour of the teachers. I generally wore casual but smart clothing although I very rarely wore a tie, unlike the male teachers in Highwoods and Petersfield. However, the need to look right, to fit in, and 'play the game' should not be underestimated; indeed, at Westmoor Abbey it was a powerful influence to which I, as researcher, began to be drawn. One or two of the pupils made personal comments about my hair style, and were keen to know the make of my trainers which I had at home. I found myself becoming more aware of my own appearance, and began to take more time to decide which clothes to wear before I left the house each morning for school.

During the time I spent in the three schools I did not overly concern myself with how the children addressed me (as long as it was polite!) and there were distinct differences in each school. There have been some researchers (such as Epstein, 1998b and Renold, 1999) who have asked the children to call them by their first names, but for me, it was usually 'Jon' or 'Mr Swain' although sometimes at Highwoods, it would be 'Sir'. In my experience as a teacher, most children (certainly of junior school age) know the teachers first names; indeed, they make it their business to find out. Many of the children knew my first name, either because they asked me directly, or they overheard another adult use it. I remember a particular pupil at Petersfield began calling me 'Jon' and soon the whole class, including the teacher, began to use my Christian name. At Highwoods, many began by calling me 'Sir' which I would always correct and asked them to call me 'Jon' or 'Mr Swain' as they wished. The pupils addressed all the male teachers as 'Sir' and, as well established habits are often hard to break, some continued to call me this throughout my entire period of fieldwork despite frequent corrections. Although, I was perfectly happy to be called 'Jon' at both Highwoods and Petersfield, all the children at Westmoor Abbey called me 'Mr Swain', for in this school I was more conscious of power relations based around 'over familiarity', and I had the suspicion that some children would call me 'Jon' as a way of testing my authoritative boundaries.

Viewing children as highly competent social beings, I also always tried to respect them, and my objective was to learn *from*, as much as *about* the children (Thorne, 1993): however, in many ways I deliberately wanted to maintain some distance between us. My belief (and although rooted in experience, it is still ultimately only a belief) was that my research needed a dialogic regard between both parties, and I felt that if I ever lost the children's respect the relationship would degenerate and have an adverse effect on the



quality of the data. This was particularly apposite in interviews where I set the boundaries for behaviour: I did not let the children lean back on their chairs or put their feet up on the table, and I would also admonish them if they openly used swear words out of the context of their account. We should not try and fool ourselves, for although I adopted a less adult-centric stance, or less teacher-centric stance, I wanted to maintain the upper hand: the children were allowed to talk freely on a range of subjects of their own choice, but eventually I would bring them back to talk about *my* areas and *my* questions. Unlike Epstein (1998b) I did not offer the children a choice of pseudonyms as I felt that although, in many ways, they *were* my research it would make little difference what they were called in it, and although I am telling a story of the time I spent with the children, it is still, ultimately, my story and not theirs. I also denied them control over my fieldnotes: occasionally, a child would ask me what I had written in my notebook but, again, in contrast to Epstein (1998b), I did not encourage them to ask me, and I did not offer to tear it out if they did not happen to like it: they were, essentially, private, idiosyncratic jottings and would be pretty meaningless to anyone else, including other adults. I will discuss the issues of power relations in interviews in more detail in Section 4.3.2.

Sometimes, I found it quite difficult to shake off the role of teacher, for like Epstein (1998b:29), I had spent a large proportion of my adult years in the classroom and had invested considerable amounts of psychic, emotional and social energy in ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ a teacher, who, by the nature of the job, has to maintain a certain distance between her/himself and the children/pupils. I always felt a little uncomfortable if the teacher left the classroom for any length of time: it was noticeable that some children would immediately look around to see what others were doing and gauge how I was going to react if they got up out of their seats, and if I felt that the some children were

going to seriously distract others I would change into teacher-mode. After all, I was indebted to the teachers for allowing me into their classrooms, and I did not want to let them down by letting the class degenerate into chaos while they had ‘popped out’ for a few moments. Although I tried hard to avoid any teaching scenarios there were a few times when I was asked to help out by taking the class, or part of the class. For example, one day at Westmoor Abbey one of the Year 6 teachers had to go home at lunchtime and the other two Year 6 teachers asked me if I would ‘help out’ by taking Year 6 games that afternoon. It was not an ideal situation but I felt that I could not turn them down. Golde (cited in Skeggs, 1994) suggests that all fieldwork should involve some form of reciprocity, and that researchers should offer some favour in return for the disruption of other people’s lives. The school had welcomed me and given me access to their world; I needed them more than they needed me and I felt that I owed it to them. During the games lesson I reverted to teacher-mode but the children expected me to do this. My contention is that as ‘skilled and knowledgeable’ agents children have a greater ability to make adequate judgements than they are often given credit for, and the majority are often able to understand that adults perform a variety of different roles, and appreciate that I could change from being a ‘friend’ to a ‘teacher’ and back again in a matter of seconds.

At different times during my fieldwork I found myself switching between the roles of being ‘more like a pupil’ or ‘more like a teacher’. Obviously I was not a pupil but the children also knew that I was not employed at the school in an official teaching capacity. In some ways I spent most of my time in *the least teacher role*. The vast majority of the children in all the schools asked me what I was and wanted to know what I did, and I told them that I had worked as a teacher in another school. In the playground I spent most of my time talking to the children and watching their games, without ever taking part. In the

classroom I sat next to the children, joined in with the lesson, helped them with their work, and sometimes took part in their activities in the form of musical compositions, painting, spelling tests, shared reading activities and so on, and this brought me closer to them. I tried to be as friendly as possible without ever trying to become one of their intimate friends. I worked at gaining their trust but sometimes my role involved a delicate balance, especially in class, for although I was reluctant to point out their misdemeanours to the teacher, I also felt uncomfortable undermining the teacher's authority. At Highwoods the Year 6-8 pupils followed a timetable of nine separate 35 minute lessons organised on a typical secondary school day, and this gave me the opportunity of observing the pupils' attitudes and behaviour with different teachers in different times and spaces. Sometimes I observed a class of pupils transform from being seemingly passive and compliant with one teacher, to being truculent and recalcitrant with another within a few minutes. One time in Latin, I recall sitting with a group of boys in the back row of the classroom, and as the lesson progressed more and more of them began to lean back on their chairs against the wall until the only person in the entire row who was sitting in the 'normal' position was myself.

### ***3.4.3 Interventions***

During my fieldwork I had to make a number of decisions over whether or not I should intervene in a variety of situations. Although I tried to take a non-interventionist and non-judgemental position my ethical position as a responsible researcher meant that some interventions were unavoidable. For example, I had one firm rule that I would always intervene if ever a child was in physical danger, and I would try and stop a serious fight if no other adults were around. However, when I was in the playground and a child came

up to tell me they were being bullied I would refer them to the teacher on duty. Connolly (1996) notes that not intervening can reinforce and almost condone attitudes and behaviours and yet, if I overheard examples of swearing, verbal bullying or homophobic abuse I would force myself to 'turn a blind eye'. For instance, here is an instance which I recorded in my field diary at Westmoor Abbey:

Fieldnotes (22.10.98). As we are leaving the classroom, I see Jack deliberately barge into Jessie. He knocks her over and she begins to cry. Jack sees that I see it but I don't assume the teacher's role and tell him off, or tell SM [*Sandra Morris, the teacher*]. Instead I ignore it –wonder if this is the right decision?

There are no easy answers here, and although I felt I might be betraying a trust by 'telling' on them, perhaps the question to ask is *whose* trust, the perpetrator's or the victim's?

During some interviews it transpired that some boys were being bullied and made to feel very unhappy. Although I told them that I was unable to intervene directly, I always asked them if they wanted me to inform another adult in the school, such as their teacher or headteacher, but this offer was not taken up. Had I ever found out (and I did not) that any child was in any immediate danger I would then have made every effort to persuade them to inform and seek help from an adult (see, for example, Alderson, 1993: Morrow and Richards, 1996; Hill, 1997).

#### ***3.4.4 Responsibilities and consent***

Trying to understand the meanings and workings of the cultures of young children may, sometimes, have an impact on contemporary events [10], and is always going to raise

ethical questions of sensitivity and responsibility, and ultimately, the issue of researchability versus the notion of consent. Writing about the problematics of informed consent Thorne (1980:285) calls for ‘consent which is knowledgeable, exercised in a situation of voluntary choice made by individuals who are competent or able to choose freely’. Morrow and Richards (1996) have written an article which deals specifically with the ethical issues involved in conducting social research with children (see, also, Alderson, 1995; Mahon et al., 1996; Hill, 1997). They maintain that, although the British Sociological Association (BSA) makes no specific guidelines on carrying out research with children as research subjects [11],

in the UK, consent is usually taken to mean consent from parents or those “in loco-parentis”, and in this respect children are to a large extent seen as their parents’ property (Morrow and Richards, 1996:94).

As far as I am aware the parents of the children were not informed by the school (and not by myself) that the children were going to be interviewed but I always considered that firstly, I had the permission to ask them from the hierarchy of adult ‘gatekeepers’ who were acting as ‘loco-parentis’ [12]; and secondly, the children were competent social agents who could decide for themselves whether they wished to be interviewed or not (see Mahon et al., 1996:150). Having worked closely with children for over 20 years I am sympathetic to the argument that children are capable of making it perfectly clear when they do not consent to a researcher’s presence/participation, and as Fine and Glassner (1979) stress, ‘informed consent’ also implies the possibility of informed rejection’, or what Morrow and Richards (1996:95) call ‘informed dissent’. I was not a stranger to the children and, in fact, during my fieldwork, no child ever turned the chance down to be interviewed and, indeed, many kept asking when the next time was going to

come round. However, although the option of refusal gives children a certain control over the research process, I would argue that the notion of informed consent to being involved is actually questionable, and that the choice is never completely voluntary. Indeed, Epstein (1998b) regards the concept of informed consent to be flawed: after all, parental consent nearly always overrides children's, and no matter how keen they might have been to participate in the research process, I would not have been able to note down my observations, or interview any child, if his/her parent(s) had objected. This would have made my research virtually impossible. During my fieldwork I wrote down a countless number of overheard conversations from both children and adults in my field diary, and it was simply not practicable to have asked individuals to give their permission every time. Moreover, my presence as an observer in the class was simply announced and they had very little choice than to concur in the matter. Also, it is never going to be possible to gain the consent to observe over 300 pupils in the playground as many researchers have experienced (see, for example, Ball, 1985; Denscombe, 1985; Kelly, 1989; Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Avoiding the full details of the research project, (which Fine and Glassner (1979) refer to as 'shallow cover'), I always began the interview by reminding the children that I was interested in finding out what it was like being a boy (or a girl) at their particular school. I asked if they minded the interview being taped (no-one did) and I stressed that the interviews were completely confidential, that no information would be disclosed, and that no-one else (such as a peer, or their teacher) would ever hear what they said. Although one of my main objectives was to facilitate a free flowing conversation, my questions were generally concerned with events and situations and I tried to discourage the children from talking about other individuals [13]. Only a very few children (certainly less than

15 out of the 130 or so that I actually interviewed) ever asked me what I was intending to do with their conversations, but when they did I generally answered by saying that I was hoping to write a book about the life of the children at school, but that I would change their individual names, and the name of the school. Although I would agree with Epstein (1998b) that the children do not possess the experience or the framework for understanding who I was, and what I represented as a researcher, and although the notion of informed consent may be flawed and the children's capacity to understand the full concept necessarily limited, I nevertheless still tried to ensure that their consent was at least informed.

### ***3.5 Defining 'ethnography'***

In this section I want to discuss and define what I understand by the term 'ethnography' and an 'ethnographic study' [14]. Although the term 'ethnography' carries a number of meanings I understand it to mean the qualitative, empirical interpretation of the practices of a specific culture in their 'natural' setting. Also, following the symbolic interactionist tradition, an attempt is made to gain an empathetic understanding of the social world under investigation from the point of view of the participants involved (Blumer, 1969), to discover the ways in which they make meanings, and the ways they make sense of their world. Skeggs maintains that ethnography is not simply a method of conducting research, but a 'theory of the research process' (Skeggs, 1994:76), while Massey and Walford (1998) suggest that a study needs to contain seven core elements in order to be termed 'ethnographic': viz.:

- \* that it involves the study of a particular culture, or way of life made up of ‘certain values, practices, relationships and identifications’ (Massey and Walford, 1998:5);
- \* it uses more than one method of data collection in order to generate different kinds of data;
- \* it involves a personal and ‘long-term’ engagement with the participants;
- \* it recognises the researcher as the primary source of data, and an integral and unavoidable feature of the research process, who needs to be continually reflexive;
- \* the accounts from the participants are given a high status, but as the researcher’s own constructed account has the highest authority there is an expectation that he/she will reveal the principles of selection that have led to particular statements and claims;
- \* there is an ongoing cycle where hypotheses and theories are modified in the light of further data and theoretical readings and interpretations;
- \* and, finally, it has the intention to provide a set of understandings of a specific culture, people, or setting, rather than produce findings that can be generalised beyond the study itself [15].

The theories I draw on also lead me to add that the participants need to be treated as ‘skilled and knowledgeable agents’, and as part of microcosms of wider structural processes.



If ethnography can be defined by its relationship to theoretical positions, my research is underpinned by a theoretical belief in a kind of realism in the sense that although, in many ways, I may have constructed the boys' world through my own personal lens, their world existed before I began my research and is still there after I left. However, I am going to postpone a number of methodological concerns until Chapter 4 (Methods and methodologies) where I will consider such issues as relationships, researcher effect, triangulation, reflexivity, the plausibility and the epistemological status of the data, the move towards textuality, and the processes of analysis including making selections, coding, organisation and representation during the writing-up process. For the moment, I merely wish to say that I am aware that as all social researchers are part of the world that they study, research is inevitably affected by the researcher's own theories and values, their biography, and their personal interests and characteristics (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Although being in the schools was hard work, the children were almost invariably enthusiastic, genial and stimulating company, and I have found myself missing these school days. During my own fieldwork I was conscious that just as the boys in my study were, in many ways, learning to become men, I was there alongside them learning to become an ethnographer and researcher (Hey, 1997). I went about trying to understand the messy complexities of life around me, and trying to find a language to explain what was happening, or what was going on, for as Clifford and Marcus (1986) say, the task of the ethnographer is to make the behaviour of a different way of life comprehensible. When in the field, the ethnographer needs to possess a range of skills and attributes in the areas of planning, organisation, observation, writing (including quick note-taking),

listening, empathy, reacting, reflexivity and not least of all, energy and stamina. Skills of negotiation are also important and I always seemed to be negotiating with teachers and the pupils: ‘Can I come to this lesson?’, ‘Can I participate in this particular conversation?’, ‘Can I sit here?’ During fieldwork there will also be feelings of guilt that you could be, and should be, doing more, and sometimes, when I was drinking my coffee in the staffroom, I wondered if I was missing out on some important (even vital) aspect of school life: for example was I spending enough time observing the pupils at breaktimes?, or was I attending a sufficient number of lunchtime clubs?, and yet, of course, I also knew that I was learning a lot about the school from the staffroom conversations.

Ethnographic research is full of surprising moments and unexpected situations. Woods (1998) writes about certain ‘critical moments’ in the research process, while Fine and Deegan (1996) talk about ‘temporal serendipity’ which means ‘being in the right place at the right time’ or being at a particular dramatic, or even ‘critical’, event. Having read about these thoughts during the early part of my study I was always waiting for my own ‘critical moment’ or event to happen during my fieldwork, perhaps just round the next corner. However, I came to realise that if I concentrated on careful planning and well-worked out routines, I was more likely than not to be in the right place at least enough times to begin to form an understanding of what was going on. Woods (1998) points out these events require the researcher’s ability to recognise and then seize the opportunity for these moments to become events which may have a dramatic bearing on the future conduct of the research process. What is more, he also points out that they can have a detrimental, as well as a positive effect. Although I agree that all research is full of ‘important’ moments, I am not sure how ‘critical’ they have to be. I recall that I often thought myself fortunate to have been in a particular classroom, or in the playground on a

particular day and time, but I doubt that, if I had missed these events, my conclusions would have been dramatically altered. Certain boys also told me things (either in interviews or in passing conversations) which I thought to be valuable but there were many of such conversations. The point is that certain events may have assumed a greater importance if I had spent only a week in each school but they become subsumed into being 'one of many' events/sayings over the course of a year. Moreover, for myself, other highly influential events regularly occurred outside of my fieldwork such as particular books/articles that I discovered or were recommended, or certain conversations that I had with my supervisors, other research tutors and/or research students.

Although ethnography involves a long term commitment, it is still also full of many fleeting, half-moments and the researcher has to guard against making false assumptions and misinterpreting events and situations. This was brought home to me by the following incident which happened in my very last week of fieldwork.

Fieldnotes: Petersfield: school hall ( 20.7.99)

*[Year 6 are rehearsing their school play which they are going to show to the parents. It is a musical about the 1960s and involves a re-enactment of the 1966 World Cup Final]*

...There's lots of shouting and cheering; DF [*Mrs Flowers, the headteacher*] comes over to the lady sitting next to me and says, 'That's as close as you'll ever get to any competitive sport in this school'. The lady sitting next to me at the back smiles – I've followed her into the hall. She's rather untidy, slightly scruffy looking, wearing a long cardigan over a bright flowery dress. She looks rather poor. I'm making comparisons with some of the parents that I have seen at Westmoor Abbey. She sings along with some of the songs; she's got a nice voice. At the end of the performance, DF has come over again and engages the lady in conversation. I wonder why; does she know her? I begin to suspect. It turns out

that she is actually the infant school headteacher! [*The word 'Warning!' was scribbled in the margin.*]

### 3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has looked at the institutional features of the school setting; notions of childhood; the problematics and processes of researching young children; and definitions of 'ethnography'. Since the Education Act of 1988, the culture of schools has changed significantly: although they still contain expectations of emancipation and social change, their own gender regimes have become increasingly infused with the discourses of masculine corporate management, and the Foucauldian control by discipline and surveillance (particularly from central government) is applied with a greater astringency. I have argued that the school is a key site in the formation of emerging masculine identities: they teach boys that there are a number of ways to *do* boy, and that some of these are given a higher status than others. Structuration always occurs in time and space, and I have also drawn attention to the fact that the capacity of controlling and regulating these two dimensions is an important constituent of school's power over the boys' (and girls') bodies. Alongside the school's own formal/official culture the boys have their own informal/unofficial culture in which they construct, negotiate and perform their individual and collective masculine identities, and as we will see in the coming empirical chapters, the two cultures work in relation to each other. I have discussed the concept of childhood and the child which are understood to be an adult-centred transient socio-cultural construction. I wish to reiterate that I endorse the 'conceptual autonomy' of children, and rather than looking at them as incomplete adults, I am arguing that they should be studied on their own terms and within their own lived experiences. What is

more, these boys are skilled and knowledgeable social agents who know a great deal about the school they attend: they are able to discuss articulately and reflexively about their own peer group, the relations of power, and general school routines, and although they probably have only an imprecise awareness of aspects of the wider society that influence the context of where their activity takes place, they are able to take action as far as their structural position allows them to in the form of using a range of symbolic resources and strategies. The practical processes of researching children in the school setting raised a number of issues including my status as an adult researcher, and the power relationships with the children. Finding it difficult to shake off my history of teacher-role, I have argued that I deliberately set out to maintain a certain distance between myself and the children in the belief that quality data was often conditional on gaining their respect and trust. I did not want to patronise the children by pretending I was like one of them when we both knew that I was not, and for the most part I tried to maintain a *least-teacher-like* role as far as was pragmatically and practically possible. In considering the role and responsibilities of the researcher I maintained that researchers are often placed in an invidious position in respect to interventions, and like any human being they do not always get it right. Likewise, I have argued that questions of confidentiality and informed consent are never going to be fully resolvable, but I tried to make sure that the children's consent was, however imperfect, at least partially informed, and I would still content that as competent social agents they were given opportunities to refuse to participate and walk away. Finally, I have based my understandings of what I mean by 'ethnography' on a set of specific and distinctive characteristics outlined by Massey and Walford (1998), and I have further highlighted the range of skills and qualities the (novice) researcher needs to learn and acquire. In the next chapter I will outline the methods that I used in my empirical work, and discuss a range of

methodological issues including how I analysed my data to make sense of what was happening in the three schools.

### Footnotes

[1] Some writers such as Klein (2000) and Willis (2000) claim that the forceful drive of commodified style culture (which is connected to the attempted domination of multinational corporations) is beginning to have far reaching effects on the formation of identities, weakening the influence of the other sites. This study begins to chart some of its effects, particularly with the logo-marked clothing worn by the pupils at Westmoor Abbey, and it would seem that there is a need for more research in this area.

[2] See, for example, Kessler et al. (1985); Askew and Ross (1988); Heward (1988); Connell (1989, 1996); Mac an Ghail (1994); Hayward and Mac an Ghail (1996); Kehily and Nayak (1997); Epstein (1997a, 1998b); Skelton (1996, 1997, 2001); Benjamin (1998, 2001); Connolly (1998); Gilbert and Gilbert (1998); Lingard and Douglas (1999); Martino (1999); Renold (1999, 2000); Francis (1998, 2000); Gordon et al. (2000a); Lesko (2000).

[3] Hargreaves (1995) points out that schools are caught in a balancing act between the instrumental and expressive domains, or between having too much or too little social control and social cohesion, and that this is a reworking of themes explored by Marx and Durkheim

[4] Similar changes have also occurred in the rest of Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Francis, 2000). Moreover, Skelton (2001) points out that the discourses of management and marketisation have been so powerful and effective that, despite changes in government, many of the policies and practices of the New Right have been incorporated by the new governments in these countries.

[5] Opening up schools to market forces was supposed to make them more business-like and more likely to produce the kinds of knowledge and skills that were needed for economic competitiveness.

[6] Galton (1989) has pointed out that the child-centred pedagogy was never as pervasive as right wing discourses of derision asserted.

[7] Said (1995) contends that knowledge/power can mean *being able to do*.

[8] I would like to point out that many educational practices are also a force for gender equity as well as inequity: boys and girls follow the same curriculum, they share the same timetable in the same classroom, and follow the same daily routines and so on. As Connell (2000:152) says, 'schools may be having a gender *effect* without producing gender *difference* (original italics).

[9] The phrase 'the least-adult' role was actually first coined by Mandell (1988).

[10] This was brought home to me when I was presenting my work a few days after the murder of Damilola Taylor in Peckham (London) in 2000, and the group included the

educational psychologist for Damilola's school. I was talking about the power of boys' peer cultures, their collective identities, and the, sometimes, overwhelming need to conform to their expectations and norms. This may lead to the subordination of others but in this case it had very obviously gone far beyond that.

[11] This is also the case with the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA).

[12]. None of the headteachers or class teachers thought that it was necessary to write to the parents about my research and, anyway, any 'covering' letter would have had to have been couched in such a nebulous way as to render it almost meaningless, perhaps along the lines of: 'Mr Swain is a researcher at the London Institute of Education who wishes to interview children to find out their thoughts and opinions about life in this school,' and so on. Moreover, BERA (Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 1992) writes that permission only needs to be obtained from parents if the school suggests it.

[13] Though this was not always possible, and many of the children wanted to talk about other individuals in both positive and negative ways.

[14] Ethnography (as a set of distinctive practices) originated from the work of anthropologists such as Malinowski and Meade (Layder, 1994).

[15] I actually go on to argue in Section 10.4.1 that, however moderate they may be, some generalisations are actually inevitable. Indeed, although the study concentrates on



the localised world of boys' peer group cultures, I posit that the way things happen in the micro world will often happen, relate to, and help us understand the macro world.

## **Chapter 4        Methods and issues of methodology**

### ***4.1 Introduction***

In this chapter I will describe the methods used in the conduct of my research, and then consider specific methodological issues which arose. Under the first section on methods I state how the three schools were selected, and provide details of a pilot study which I conducted in order to develop my skills and techniques of fieldwork. I then discuss my two principal methods of data collection: observations (and the accompanying fieldnotes); and the structure and processes involved in group interviews. Contextual information is also provided about numbers of interviews and days spent in each school. In the second section on issues arising from the methods used, I examine the question of how you know when to stop sampling, and appraise the status and validity of interview data, arguing that interviews need to be viewed as socially co-constructed accounts. After critiquing simplistic views of triangulation, I consider problems of contamination and reactivity, and highlight the reflexive nature of the research process which recognises the researcher as an inescapable and constituent part. I then proceed to discuss the postmodernist ethnographic turn towards textuality. Although I acknowledge and partly accede to this form, I still wish to emphasise that my account in this thesis is not fiction but refers to real people living 'real' lives in an existing material world. I then continue by specifying the process of transcription of interviews and use of fieldnotes. In the final section, concerning the analysis of the data, my objective is to make the process as explicit as possible and show how the principles of selection, which operate at all stages of the research process, were used through the analysis to the presentation of the

conclusions. I discuss the dialogical relations between theory and data; describe how I used the computer program NUD\*IST 4; and examine the problematic of transforming data during the process of writing and representation.

## ***4.2 Methods***

This section begins with a review of the methods I used to generate my findings. By ‘methods’ I mean the techniques and procedures that I used in the data-gathering process to enable me to interpret and explain what was happening, or what was going on in the three schools (Cohen and Manion, 1989). Before I could begin the empirical phase of the study it was necessary to decide who I was going to study, and where I was going to study them.

### ***4.2.1 Sampling***

All empirical research involves using a sample of some kind, and this involves using principles of selection or delimitation which, of course, operate at all stages of the research project. In my original research proposal I drew on Brown and Dowlings’ (1998:144) framework to establish a clear relationship between theory and empirical work. The *empirical field* was the interpersonal interactions of boys in the junior school, and for the specific *empirical setting* I chose three junior schools differentiated by the social characteristics of their intake. The *theoretical field* began as a broad sociological approach to the effect of gender in education, before specialising in the area of feminist cultural studies of masculinity. After identifying a series of key works and positions, which Brown and Dowling define as the *problematic*, I was eventually able to formulate

my research question, or *problem*. Thus, after much effort, a set of personally interesting but vague ideas and proposals were transformed and refined into a considered, coherent and explicit proposal. In fact, during the whole research process, the research question goes on being further refined and revised, gradually becoming more and more specific and clearly defined.

I decided to undertake a comparative study; that is, one of my objectives was to look for similarities and differences. Originally, I thought about studying two age groups of boys (7-8 year olds [Year 3], and 10-11 year olds [Year 6]), but finally focused on just one age group of 10-11 year olds which I felt would be more manageable (given the scale and scope of a PhD) in terms of data collection and analysis. This would give me an opportunity to study children and adults in their school contexts in greater depth, and for the same reasons, I also initially decided to concentrate on just one Year 6 class in each school. As a key variable in my research design was social class, I decided to choose three schools which were differentiated in terms of the social characteristics of their intake (for a fuller discussion of this see Section 5.5). As I felt that two schools would not provide a sufficiently marked contrast, and considering issues of data and time management, I decided to site my empirical work in three schools. Although I had decided to concentrate on boys' masculine identities, I wanted the schools to be co-educational as relations of gender were an integral part of my study, and I was interested to see what each gender group thought and said about each other, and how they interacted.

Two schools were LEA junior schools (with pupils aged between 7-11), the other was an independent, fee-paying junior school (with pupils aged between 7-13). Initially, I found

it difficult to access a co-educational independent (private) school, but finally negotiated entry into a school through a friend who knew the headteacher; the two LEA schools (in different authorities) were also found through personal contact, by way of the LEA inspectorate, members of which I knew from my days as a full-time teacher. Details of the three schools are repeated below from Chapter 1 (see Table 4.1).

<b>Name of school</b>	<b>Type of school</b>	<b>Number on roll [1]</b>	<b>Social characteristics of intake</b>
Highwoods Independent	Private, fee-paying	350	Upper-middle class
Petersfield Junior	LEA	425	Middle class
Westmoor Abbey Junior	LEA	300	Working class

Table 4.1: School type, size, and the social characteristics of their intake

#### ***4.2.2 The pilot study***

Although all three schools had been confirmed by the beginning of 1998, I was not due to begin my fieldwork until September. During the period of February to early May of that year I decided to embark on a pilot project in another junior school which was situated on the outskirts of a small town in Southern England. Over an 8 week period I spent two or three days a week with two classes, one Year 3 and one Year 6. As a novice researcher, I did not want to arrive in a school on my first day of fieldwork without having a pretty good idea of what I was supposed to be looking for, and it was in this school (which I have called Bridgehead), that I developed and refined my skills in observation, fieldnote-

taking, interviewing, transcription, analysis, time-management, and of negotiation with the various personnel involved. Interview schedules were created, trialled and modified, and altogether I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews of both lower- and upper-school pupils, usually in groups of two or three children selected on the basis of friendship. During the first few interviews I took notes, before subsequently deciding to use a tape recorder. It was during this stage of the project that I decided, henceforth, to concentrate on just one age group; it was also the period when I first began to apply the theories that I had been engaging with to gathering and analysing data, and when I first began to develop some of the incipient themes that I was going to explore in the main study. It was also the time when I started to write ethnography in the academic genre, and used my experiences to write my first academic paper on the role of playground football in the construction of masculinity (see Swain, 2000). Before I left the school, I was able to feedback some of the outcomes from this early stage of the research to the headteacher and the two class teachers involved.

#### *4.2.3 The main study*

I began the main part of the fieldwork on 14 September 1998 at Highwoods. However, I did not want to spend the whole term in one school because I wanted to sample activities across the year in each school. Moreover, my own experience of teaching in the junior school led me to believe that some boys might behave differently once the SATs were over in early May, and where they were, in the case of the two LEA schools, waiting to leave their junior school to start secondary school in September. I decided to follow a rolling programme of fieldwork spending about two or three days a week for a month in each term in each school [2] and in total, I was in the schools for 91 days (see Table 4.2).

As intended, I concentrated on one Year 6 class (10-11 year olds) in the two LEA schools; however, after the first term at Highwoods, I decided to spend time with two classes as the pupils here were organised by academic attainment, as I wanted to investigate the widest possible range of masculinities [3].

<b>School term</b>	<b>Highwoods</b>	<b>Petersfield</b>	<b>Westmoor Abbey</b>
Autumn	12 days	10 days	11 days
Spring	12 days	9 days	11 days
Summer	8 days	10 days	10 days
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30 days</b>	<b>29 days</b>	<b>32 days</b>

Table 4.2: Time spent in each school

#### ***4.2.4 Observations and fieldnotes***

The descriptions and interpretations in this thesis are based on two major sources of data: observation and interview, and this section explores my methods of observation which provide a record of the motives and interactions between the actors themselves, and ‘shows us everyday life being brought into being’ (Miller and Dingwall, 1997:61). For me, observation was a vital and fundamental method of trying to understand and explain events and interactions, and I found there was a dialogic relationship between my observations and the interviews: the observations guided me to some of the questions that I wanted to ask the pupils during the interviews, and the interviews helped me interpret the significance of what I was observing. May (1997:138) argues that participant observation is probably ‘the most personally demanding and analytically difficult method of social research to undertake’. He points out that it requires physical and emotional

endurance to spend time observing, and trying to find out about rules and customs in new settings; to secure and maintain personal relationships with people who you may have little personal affinity with; to take copious notes of often mundane and fairly prosaic happenings; and then, afterwards, spend months on analysis. Field research roles will range along a continuum from complete observer to complete participant. Over the course of my fieldwork I actually took part in many different forms of participation such as watching, sharing, listening, learning, discussing, playing, collaborating and helping, which in some ways, could be described as a form of *semi-participant observation*.

Describing what has been observed and noted during participant observation should be an integral part of ethnographic research, and the collection and maintenance of fieldnotes constituted a central a part of my data collection and were compiled with as much care as possible. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:179) write that ‘it is difficult to overemphasise the importance of meticulous note-taking’, and further maintain that a research project without sufficient note-taking is analogous to using ‘a camera with poor-quality film’ (Hammersley and Atkinson,1995:175). However, I feel that it is also important to recognise, and acknowledge, that only a tiny fraction of what we see is ever going to be written down, and that impressions and unrecorded recollections based on more unreliable fragments of memory will also, inevitably, intrude into the construction of the overall picture.

Walford (2000) speculates that few researchers now actually use fieldnotes in their descriptive accounts because they no longer take time to write them up adequately, while Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out that even for those authors that do use them, few actually make them explicitly available for the edification of other researchers, and it



is only recently that researchers have begun to make the construction and maintenance of fieldnotes more open (see, for example, Sanjeck, 1990; Emerson et al., 1995; Graue and Walsh, 1998; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Renold, 1999). One consequence of this is that there are precious few models to follow or learn from. Before I began the pilot study I was asking myself such questions as, 'What should I write', 'When should I write', and 'How should I write'? However, fieldnotes are an individual construction, to be developed to suit the person doing the research; there is no one 'best' or correct way, and I knew that I needed to find my own format and style. The test was whether or not I found them useful, and how often I went back and re-read them, or used them in my final descriptions. In fact, I found that sometimes even the briefest jotting or scribble was enough to trigger a memory and aid in the construction of a more detailed account. Of course analytical ideas and concepts change over the research period, and so what is included in the fieldnotes will also change. Like all research, it is important that they are seen as part of a reflexive process.

Fieldnotes certainly need to be written up as quickly as possible after the observed action, and I generally found a time during the school day when the pupils were not engaged in activities which were directly relevant to the research. Although it took a good deal of discipline, with very few exceptions, I either wrote them up during part of the same school day, away from the pupils, or as soon as I got home. I used a separate ringed notebook for each school, and one of the first things I did was to record a plan of the classroom with an indication of the seating positions by name and gender. This was a useful way of learning names (if and when they kept regular places), and was also a clear record of the fact that boys and girls invariably organised their seating by gender when

they were given the choice. In some ways, it represented a microcosm of the social relations found within the school.

One way of using fieldnotes is for them to give a voice to the children who do not appear very often in the interview transcripts. This may be due to a number of reasons: they may be reticent, introverted, less articulate, marginalised, uninterested and so on, but fieldnotes are a way of indicating their presence, their actions, and/or their views and opinions. I did not carry my field diary around with me everywhere I went; for example, I did not take it into the playground, or onto the games field, or into the dining hall. There were many conversations that I wished I could have captured on tape but this is where fieldnotes came in. Although I tried to get it as near to verbatim as possible, it was never conceivable to recapture conversations word perfect for, of course, memory is partial and malleable, and is shaped by later experiences (Thorne, 1993).

During my pilot study I developed a system of fieldnote-taking whereby I ruled a margin approximately two-thirds of the way across the page and wrote my descriptions on the left, and the first stages of thematic analysis on the right (I have subsequently found out that May (1997) suggests something similar). I provide an example from my field diary in the appendices (see Appendix 1).

#### *4.2.5 Group interviews: structure and process*

After observation, my second major method of data gathering was the interview. This next section examines the structure, and explores the process of conducting formal, although loosely structured, group interviews. I say 'formal' in the sense that I explicitly

sat down with people with the intention to interview them, but during my fieldwork I also had countless other informal conversations with pupils and adults at various times and in various places (for example, with teachers over coffee in the staffroom, on playground duty or walking along the corridor; and with pupils over lunch, in the playground, lining up outside a classroom and so on), some of which (when relevant to my research question) were recorded in my fieldnotes, and which Burgess (1988:153) refers to as ‘conversations with a purpose’ (see, also, Graue and Walsh, 1998).

During the research period I conducted a total of 109 ‘formal interviews’ between September 1998 and July 1999 (see Table 4.3). Out of the total of 109 interviews, 5 were with adults and 104 were with pupils ( 62 with boys only; 39 with girls only; and 3 with mixed gender groups).

<b>School</b>	<b>Adults</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Total</b>
Highwoods	1	22	8	0	31
Petersfield	2	20	13	0	35
Westmoor Abbey	2	20	18	3	43
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>109</b>

Table 4.3: Number of interviews in each school

Altogether, I interviewed 130 children (76 boys and 54 girls), although of course I spoke to many more. Many were interviewed twice, and a few were interviewed on three or four occasions. I decided on group interviews from the very beginning of my research design: this has been a particularly effective method when used in research with younger

children (see, for example, Lewis, 1992; Hale et al., 1996; Connolly, 1997, 1998; Skelton, 1997; Adler and Adler, 1998; Benjamin, 1998; Epstein, 1998b; Renold, 1999), for if meanings are generated through social interaction, group interviews seemed to be the most effective way of observing, capturing and exploring these interactions (see, for example, Lewis, 1992; Kitzinger, 1994; Denscombe, 1995; Agar and MacDonald, 1995). Kitzinger (1994:159) comments on the dynamic, interactive nature of group interviews and how they 'enable the researcher to examine people's different perspectives as they operate within a social network, and to explore how accounts are constructed, expressed, censured, opposed and changed through social interaction.' Connolly (1997) suggests that group interviews may have the tendency to reduce the salience of the researcher's presence, and of course, the interaction between the pupils was at least as important as the interaction between myself (as the interviewer) and the interviewees. Denscombe (1995:137) also points out how group interviews can produce data on 'shared perspectives' and can generate complex understandings and contradictions: there were times when events and/or experiences were introduced by one of the participants which sometimes resulted in the productive re-telling by other children involved and which Kitzinger (1994) has termed 'collective remembering'. Another productive result from the group interviews was that stories told by one of the participants could be scrutinised and verified by others. As Denscombe writes, they are a place 'where events, legends, actions and attitudes are subjected to peer scrutiny and evaluation' (Denscombe, 1995:137).

Although a further advantage of group interviews is that they may also encourage children to participate who may be more reticent in a one-to-one interview situation, there are also a number of disadvantages that have to be guarded against. I certainly needed to

watch out for problems of domination (see, for example, Watts and Ebbutt, 1987; Denscombe, 1995) in which the dominant and opinionated person can inhibit others into silence, either by simple volubility or by force of argument. It is also possible that some pupils may have been reluctant to talk about personal issues for fear of embarrassment or ridicule. Two or three people talking over each other sometimes also caused me transcription problems, and decisions had to be made of which voices to prioritise; very occasionally, voices were simply unattributable.

I selected the pupils for interview by asking them to nominate one or two friends anonymously, and I interviewed them in groups of between two or three. Another important reason to group children together by friendship groups was to create a familiar and secure atmosphere of trust (see, for example, Woods, 1981; Davies, 1982; Lewis, 1992; Mauthner, 1996; Hill, 1997), and being with friends also enhanced the possibility of them talking more freely. All the interviews took place within the school day, mainly at breaktimes, and the vast majority were completed within one session. All interviews were tape recorded and most lasted between half an hour to an hour and a quarter, the average length being about 40 minutes. They were situated in staffrooms, music rooms, medical rooms, interview rooms, spare classrooms, and a few even took place on school fields during the summer months: in other words, anywhere where privacy was assured [4].

Before I began interviewing, the first two or three weeks in each school were spent in observing and getting to know the pupils (talking to them, having lunch with them, helping them with their class-work, and generally 'hanging around') in an effort to gain their trust and confidence. Measor (1985) also suggests that the best strategy is to build

up good relationships beforehand so that the interviewees feel comfortable and free to talk to the interviewer. However, although I would tend to agree with this, and it is probably better to get to know the interviewees a little before the interview takes place, some of my richest data (in the sense of the insights it provided) came during interviews with pupils from five other parallel classes (two from each LEA school, one at Highwoods), and although they would have most likely seen me around the school at various times before, and possibly heard something about what I was doing from their peers, for the most part I had not spoken to them before we sat down together.

Rather than actually ‘interviewing’ the pupils, I saw my main task as trying to establish, and facilitate, a free flowing discussion where I could collect a wide range of opinions, and I tried to make them as close as possible to the social encounters and interactions found in everyday life. However, I also used directive questioning in order to test out emerging theories, pursue and clarify points arising during the interview, and to cross-check data from other pupils. Like Denzin and Lincoln (1994), I felt that gaining a rapport with the pupils was essential: by rapport, I mean that I tried to put them at ease and develop a mutual trust, trying to see the situation from their perspective and point of view, and making them feel that I valued what they had to say. However, I always felt the predicament of achieving the right balance between achieving rapport whilst still maintaining overall control (see Section 3.4.2). The interviews were semi-structured, or loosely structured, around a series of around 20-30 questions or areas of interest (to me) which I used as a checklist, and were followed in no particular order; some questions were general and open, some more focused. I include interview schedules of both pupils and teachers from one term at Petersfield by way of example (see Appendices 2 and 3). Interview questions/areas of interest did not differ that much between schools, except

where there were different areas to investigate which were specific to each setting such as, for example, rugby at Highwoods, or the wearing of training shoes at Westmoor Abbey. By the time of my second visit during the spring term, new interview questions were formulated to find out and gain further information on particular areas of interest, and check out developing theoretical propositions. This is similar to the 'funnel' or 'spiral' effect in qualitative studies in which data begins to progressively clarify the object of analysis (see for example, Glasier and Strauss, 1967; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Flick, 1998).

#### *4.3 Issues raised by the research methods*

The research methods which I have discussed above raise a number of issues which concern the 'status' or 'plausibility' of the data (see, for example, Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Flick, 1998; Scott and Usher, 1999). The next section seeks to address these issues and I have grouped them into those arising from sampling and interviewing, before considering issues of triangulation, contamination and reactivity, the epistemological status of the data, and the process of transcription.

##### *4.3.1 When to stop sampling*

One decision that always has to be made is at what point do you stop sampling? In qualitative research the sample is usually deemed to be adequate when the point of 'theoretical saturation' (Glasier and Strauss, 1967:61) has been reached, and when I returned to the schools during the summer term I found that I was not obtaining a great deal of new data that either qualified, challenged or generated any new theoretical insights. It was at this point that I decided to interview groups of pupils from other Year

6 classes (5 at Highwoods, 8 at Petersfields, and 8 at Westmoor Abbey), in order to explore views and perspectives in different areas and positions in the school, and gain a deeper understanding on a wider range of themes.

#### *4.3.2 The status of interview data*

The interview is seen as an essential tool of the researcher in educational enquiry, and one of its many attractions is that they can appear to give us an immediate reward: the interview has been completed, the data is in the bank, the tape has been dated and numbered and now awaits the analysis. However, many writers (see, for example, Measor, 1985; P. Jones, 1993; Connolly, 1997; May, 1997; Miller and Dingwall, 1997; Walford, 2000) have cautioned that we need to acknowledge that interviews are more likely to be a source of distortion than revelation. For, however ‘natural’ we try and make the interview setting, nothing can prevent it from being an artificial situation which can be viewed as an artefact, a joint accomplishment between interviewer and interviewee (Miller and Dingwall, 1997). As Walford puts it, ‘interviewers and interviewees co-construct the interview and the replies to questions are produced for that particular occasion and circumstance’ (Walford, 2000:6).

Although I tried to make the pupils feel relaxed and as natural as possible, the interviews were not intended to resemble a conversation in the strictest sense. In fact, Miller and Dingwall (1997:59) explicitly point out that an interview is not a conversation: ‘it is a deliberately created opportunity to talk about something that the interviewer is interested in and that may or may not be of interest to the respondents.’ Moreover, unlike in many



conversations, what the interviewee says is not transitory, but is often recorded for analysis, and therefore, may be invested with significance at a later date.

There is a great deal of uncertainty about the validity of interviews. Many interviewers (see, for example, Measor, 1985; Connolly, 1997; Walford, 2000) have long been aware of the possible effects that the interviewer might have on what the interviewees are likely to say to him or her. For example, Measor (1985) argues, convincingly, that during her research into adolescence she would have been unlikely to have elicited data from girls about puberty and menstruation had she been male, and I would have no doubt found it more difficult to obtain information from the boys on, say football, had I either little personal interest, or more importantly, knowledge to sustain the conversation and guide me to the type of questions I should ask.

It should be acknowledged that what the interviewee wants us to hear will be the result of their interpretation of us from our own interactional cues: appearance, age, gender, ethnicity, clothing, reciprocal areas of interest and conversation, accent, tone, posture and other non-verbal signals are all variables to be taken into consideration, although, of course, they have a similar effect outside the interview room (issues of reactivity are further discussed below in Section 4.3.4). Moreover, external events may also have an effect: the pupil may have just been told off by the teacher, or they may have had an argument with their best friend that morning and so on; interruption during interview, the time of day or year, and even the weather may also be important. Researchers need to be critically reflexive (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) and aware of their own assumptions, and own role in the research process.

I was also conscious that I needed to consider the context of where my interviews took place, namely on the school site. Scott and Usher (1999) point out that when an adult researcher interviews children within a school setting the child will probably understand the role of the researcher in terms of the power relations in which they occur; that is, in the codes and signs of the pupil/teacher relationship, and they may choose their responses accordingly. Every person who is interviewed carries with them their own idea of what the interview actually is, and an inescapable consequence of any interview is that the interviewee is always going to be concerned with demonstrating their own competence; as Walford (2000:8) says, 'we try to present a reasonably rational image of our own uncertainty'. The interview is then, essentially, a social construct with the interviewees looking to present responses through 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959:206) which they believe will be acceptable to the interviewer. Connolly (1997) recognises that children will say different things to different people at particular times and places, although this should not surprise us, for if we agree that children are competent social actors, the corollary of this is that they will be able to alter their behaviour and narrative accounts to suit different contexts.

Even if we put aside (for one moment) the epistemological question of whether or not there is any ultimate social 'reality' to be communicated, the interviewees may still have incomplete knowledge, they may have unreliable memories, or they may deliberately tell untruths. Douglas (1976) argues that there are four main problems which lie in the way of understanding social reality by asking people what they think is going on: misinformation, evasion, lies and fronts. The stark message is that you should not trust everything a person tells you, but as we recognise that the accounts that we hear in everyday life are, by definition, representations which may or may not contain a mixture

of the real we should not be surprised that the same will apply to those that we receive in interview (Miller and Dingwall, 1997:60). However, although interview data does not offer us literal descriptions of the interviewee's reality, this is not to say that they are of no use whatsoever. Massey and Walford (1998) point out that the participants know things about themselves which nobody else knows: indeed, I stated in the previous chapter (Section 2.3) that Thomas (1928:572, cited in Plummer, 1996:228) contends that 'if men (sic) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences', and if he is correct, and people presume this to be the reality of their world, these thoughts, the selections of things they say, and the way they choose to present them, become important to the researcher as he/she seeks to understand the ways that the participants make sense of their world and the meanings they attach to it [5]. I would argue that interview data needs to be examined as *accounts*, and we should not worry about whether or not 'the informant is telling the truth' (Dean and Whyte, 1979), if by that we mean trying to uncover distortion, bias and/or deception. Rather than trying to find contrasts and inconsistencies between what people say and do, we need to pay attention to the plausibility of the accounts and their essentially performative nature

#### ***4.3.3 Triangulation***

While Miller and Dingwall (1997) suggest that observations should be the main method of ethnographic research, Walford (2000) maintains that some researchers have begun to prioritise interviews over observations, and warns that descriptive claims and explanations may be diminished when they are presented *solely* on what people say in interview, rather than on observing what they do and say in more naturally occurring settings. Writers such as Miller and Dingwall (1997) and Walford (2000) argue that it is

unwise to rely on one method of data collection, and as I have written in Section 3.5, Massey and Walford (1998) contend that using only one method invalidates the research from being called an ethnography. While there may be serious reservations as to whether triangulation is actually even theoretically possible (see Massey, 1999), at least there is a greater possibility that major errors may be eradicated from data that is generated by using a number of methods. Miller and Dingwall (1997) maintain that where interviewers construct data, observers find it, although this may be a too simplistic conception which treats the relationships between the two methods as relatively unproblematic. Atkinson and Coffey (2001) suggest that researchers should neither integrate them nor privilege one method over the other, maintaining that the underlying problem with a simple view of triangulation is that it treats the nature of social reality as relatively straightforward, and the relationship between the social world, and the methods of investigating it, as transparent. However, as Atkinson and Coffey (2001) point out, we cannot assume a unitary and stable world that can be viewed from a series of different standpoints or perspectives, but rather we need to consider the *reflexive* nature of the research process. Although reflexivity is a term that is often given a diverse range of connotations, I am using it here in the sense that we need to acknowledge that the methods we use to describe the world help to establish, and are in many ways constitutive, of the realities they describe (see also Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997).

Contrary to both Miller and Dingwall (1997) and Walford (2000), Atkinson and Coffey (2001) also maintain that researchers should not assume that *what is done* should necessarily have primacy over *what is said*, but rather we should treat what we observe and the contents of interviews as different and distinctive kinds of social action which

produces data of different forms. Rather than trying to combine the two methods, we should concentrate more on the performance of the social action. Perhaps we need to recognise that we all behave and act in different ways inside schools to outside them, and should not automatically assume that what people do is relatively unproblematic and amenable to observation and description. Moreover, events described from observations are like interviews in that they are also enacted and performed, and then selected, recorded and narrated by the researcher. Of course, for something to be an 'event' it needs to be invested with a certain significance; it needs a beginning, a middle and an end to differentiate it from the surrounding stream of activity. Atkinson and Coffey (2001) argue that as its structure, and the observer's ability to recognise and report on it, are essentially narrative in form, it is possible to argue that distinctions between 'events' that are observed and 'accounts' that are reported from interview become more blurred and more difficult to sustain.

#### *4.3.4 Contamination and reactivity*

If the ultimate aim in ethnography is for the researcher to try to pass themselves off as an ordinary member of the cultural community he or she is investigating it is one that is seldom achieved. Besides, it misses the point. Empiricists speak of issues of 'reactivity' and 'contamination', although this is an unhelpful way of viewing the research process for, as I have argued above, we should be able to recognise through reflexivity that we are an active and inevitable constitutive part of the social events and processes that we (as the researcher) observe and then narrate. Overemphasising our potential to change things may inflate our importance, but to try and eradicate being there is to misunderstand the inherent qualities of the research process, in terms of describing and making sense of the

social world of which we are a part, both through participant observation, or as the mediator of shared accounts from interviews. During interview, the researcher's task is not so much to try to eliminate it, but rather to understand its dynamics as they operate in the interview context. In fact, I would go on to maintain that reactivity (as a form of social recognition) can be desirable as well as being problematic, for as Anna Laerke (1998, cited in Redman, 1998) writes, research is always produced through and by the researcher's personal biography, and this biography should therefore be seen as a key resource in the researcher's ability to recognise and gain access to the interviewee's cultural world.

#### *4.3.5 The epistemological status of the data*

Common-sense intuition seems to tell us that the world is 'real' and that it exists around us, independently and 'out there'; that truth is a matter of *correspondence* between theoretical statements and the way the world actually is. Moreover, giving priority to the world 'as it is' over human descriptions implies that language is a transparent medium that allows us to represent the world accurately. This positivist fetish of objective detachment and neutrality is neatly caricatured by Haraway (1991) when she describes the 'God trick...[as] that mode of seeing that pretends to offer a vision that is simultaneously from everywhere and nowhere, equally and fully' (Haraway, 1991:584). This, of course, is a version promoting a universal truth that at the same time denies the 'truth' of the researcher's interests, politics, values and theoretical orientations. Whether we like it or not, the researcher is *the* instrument of data collection (G.Brown, 1984, cited in May, 1997), and as I have stated, is an inevitable constituent of the research process.

Within the past twenty years or so there has been a postmodernist move in ethnography towards 'textuality' in which problems of description have become problems of representation (see, for example, Geertz, 1973; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Atkinson, 1990; Stanley, 1992; Silverman, 1993). The shift to textuality highlights how language defines, limits and creates the world, for as Denzin writes, the texts 'do not mirror [the] world. They recreate a version of it through their own narrative, interpretative structures' (Denzin, 1990:85). Critical ethnography not only foregrounds the textuality of research, but highlights the place of writing within the research process, for as Clifford and Marcus (1986:2) maintain, 'writing has emerged as central to what researchers do both in the field and thereafter.' Ethnography is always writing, and this focus on writing and text-making highlights the constructed and contested nature of cultural accounts, and affirms that ethnography is not concerned with representing the world as it really is, but rather inventing or re/presenting it. Clifford and Marcus regard ethnographic writing as fiction and, ultimately, there is only the constructed understanding of the constructed researcher's constructed point of view (Crapanzano, 1986).

Extreme versions of this cultural relativism can suggest that ethnographic accounts are all equally valid (Dawson and Prus, 1995) and so an assessment of their validity is impossible. However, this has a tendency to result in a kind of paralysis, slipping towards nihilism, and as Gill (1998) says, you can end up feeling you are chasing your own shadow. Other writers (see, for example, Foley, 1990; Probyn, 1993) have also questioned some of the most excessive post-structural and post-textual claims, suggesting that some texts are more interested in epistemology and writing than what is being written about. Morley (1997) wants to avoid the disabling of empirical research by a shifting relativism which denies any notion of truth; Roman (1993) and McRobbie (1996,

1997) both call for ethnographic accounts that do not dematerialise the social and cultural; and Gordon et al. (2000b) argue that the textual turn has turned ethnography into a purely discursive activity, emptied of bodies and people's experiences.

However, this literary dimension is not quite so easy to reject. Denscombe (1995) draws attention to the 'storytelling' aspect of ethnography for ethnographers do use such processes of narrative and metaphor to select and impose meanings, and all research, inevitably, involves representation. Indeed, Lemert (1997) argues that the reality contained in empirical texts, such as fieldnotes and interview transcripts, is always textual: firstly, this reality is literally inscribed and goes unrecorded and unanalysed without actually being written; secondly, these texts can only be used to generate knowledge in relation to other empirical texts and, of even more importance, other theoretical texts which are used to make sense of them – in other words, Lemert is saying that the research process is not so much about using theories to make sense of reality, but about using texts to understand other texts.

In many ways I do not wish to reject, or to argue against the textuality and dialogic character of the data that I collected: like Redman (1998), I accept that my interpretation and analysis of the data represents a *reading* of it rather than an empirical truth; the writing up of the data uses principles of selection and organisation (or recontextualisation) which are orientated to the expectations of particular audiences; and the reader of the work will also make an active appropriation of it by their own re-reading and interpretation. Moreover, the social world or 'the field' is not something 'out there' but is discursively shaped, or textually constructed, by the researcher (Atkinson, 1990, 1992). Events from observations are enacted, and then selected, recorded and narrated by the



researcher, and as I have maintained above, interview data will inevitably be mediated and constructed through the views of the subjects and the researcher; there will be manifest relations of power; there will be managed impressions and presentations of self; responses will be shaped by their perception of the person asking the questions; and their responses will be produced from within the context of the interview, and are not passive reflections of the world outside the room. However, while I do not stake any claims of writing about reality and truth, I do not consider my account to be fiction, and I would still wish to maintain that the data presented in this thesis still refers to an actual, existing material social and cultural world, and that it provides access to the ways in which embodied pupils (and adults) experienced their world and the meanings they attached to it: ultimately, it relates to real people living 'real' lives (Probyn, 1993).

#### ***4.3.6 Transcription***

Before I could begin to formally code and analyse my interviews I had to tackle the issue of transcribing and decide firstly, whether I was going to transcribe every interview, and secondly, whether I was going to transcribe every interview in its entirety. Walford (2000) refers to 'the fetish of transcription' with the 'over-dependence' many researchers have of transcribing every word of every tape-recording. There are no firm rules governing procedure, but the nature of the transcription will depend on the research question being addressed and the focus and purpose of the research. For example, if the research is about discourse and involves conversational analysis it is reasonable to assume that a full transcript will be needed, but in my case I felt that a detailed transcription of every word was unnecessary: primarily, I was interested in *what* the children said rather than in *how* they said it. As I had conducted 109 interviews I had to

take a pragmatic decision. Interview times varied but usually lasted anything from between half an hour to an hour and a quarter (the average length was around 40 minutes), and as a fairly slow typist my ratio was around 6-7 hours for every hour of tape. Although it is said that transcribing makes the researcher engage with the data, the point is that I already had by listening to the tapes, making the notes and analysing the themes. The procedure I followed was as follows: I listened to the whole of each tape using a tape-player with a counter; and as I listened I made detailed pencil-and-paper notes and marked each change of theme (which would often coincide with each new question) against the number on the counter. Then I went through again and transcribed those parts of the interview that were directly relevant to my research question in the sense that they were significant to my understanding of trying to find out what was going on. For example, I would not generally transcribe many of the passages which were repetitious, or where the pupils were relaying routine procedural information (such as how literacy hour was organised, how and when homework was given out, or what pupils needed to wear for PE), or miscellaneous personal information (such as on favourite TV programmes, football teams, hobbies and so on). Although these may have turned out to be important I still had my record of them which of course constituted data in its own right. I may lay myself open to the accusation that research question and the focus could have changed, but both my detailed notes and the original tapes were still there, and I could still have transcribed the appropriate parts had I subsequently judged it to be necessary.

#### ***4.4 The analysis***

This final section provides details of the methods used, and methodological issues that arose from the analysis of the data. If the task of analysis is to search for meaning, my objective is to make the process as explicit as possible, and show how the principles of selection were used through the analysis to the presentation of the conclusions. I discuss the dialogical relationship between theory and data; how I used the qualitative analysis program NUD\*IST 4; and discuss my role as translator in moving from empirical data to a coherent written account.

##### ***4.4.1 The process of analysis***

One of the dilemmas for the ethnographer comes in selecting the material to use in the final account. After all, it is important to remember that this thesis probably contains less than 1% of the material that I recorded in my field diary and on tape, and that this is also probably less than 1% of every thing that I experienced (primarily saw and heard) over the 8 month research period in the three schools. Although different writers use different ways of interpreting and methods for analysis, many understand the process to be ongoing, cyclical and reflexive, and they follow the common features and processes listed by Miles and Huberman (1994): reading, reflecting and coding, sorting and sifting for patterns, themes, differences and relationships. My analysis of the data in this thesis was the result of a continuing interactive dialogue between theory and data. My theoretical assumptions discussed in Chapter 2 not only shaped my research questions and influenced the methods of data collection, but also the ongoing coding and interpretation of the data. There is always theory, but this is not to say that these same interpretations and assumptions cannot be simply applied or 'read off' (Holland et al., 1998:221), or that

they may not be called into question by engagement with the transcripts (Redman, 1998). In some ways, new theoretical readings are a form of analysis because they produce new and deeper insights. Although I am arguing against the empiricist notion that categories simply emerge from the data in some kind of uncomplicated and straightforward fashion, new coding categories can become apparent in the data in the light of new readings and theoretical understandings. A good example of this is the category of 'the body' which assumed an increasingly important and central place as the study progressed.

It is important to acknowledge that the investigation of the same research question by a different researcher, using different methods and theoretical orientations, would produce a different account. Even though, I would hope, that another researcher using the *same* methods and theories would come up with a set of conclusions that were at least, in part, similar to my own (for example, they would find a range and hierarchy of masculinities, or they would find a link between physicality and the establishment of peer group status), they would still be presenting their version *as they saw it* [6].

#### ***4.4.2 Interpretations, coding and analysis using NUD\*IST 4***

For much of my data analysis I used the qualitative data analysis program, QSR NUD\*IST 4. There are some researchers who maintain that cut and paste and search facilities will still suffice in the analysis of qualitative data (see, for example, Stanley and Temple, 1995). This will obviously depend on the nature and the size of the research project. I would suggest that under 30 transcripts from hour-long interviews are probably manageable using these methods but, ultimately, it depends on the individual's ability, capacity and confidence to deal with it. Although, it can be argued that the underlying

logic of coding and searching for coded segments of data on the computer is not significantly different from that of manual techniques, the computer can cope with multiple and overlapping codes, and conduct multiple searches using more than one code simultaneously within a matter of seconds.

I did not start using NUD\*IST 4 until my field work had been completed, and so did not use it to code, interpret and theorise my fieldnotes, which were coded with headings in the margin both contemporaneously and retrospectively after reading and rereading to gain greater familiarisation. In fact, I originally took time out from my writing (January and February 2000) to investigate the more powerful and sophisticated follow up program to NUD\*IST 4 called NVivo, only to discover that after a couple of months or so it was too difficult to run on my recently acquired iMac, in the sense that the recall of data was very slow. Much of research is due to opportunism, chance and even fate, and had I just invested in a PC my data would almost certainly have been analysed using NVivo. However, NUD\*IST 4 was adequate and sufficient to meet my research needs, and has the added advantage of being simpler and, therefore, easier to learn.

Although my late engagement with NUD\*IST 4 meant that I did not fully utilise its theory-building potential, I still found it an invaluable resource for organising and managing my interview data (which Lofland and Lofland (1995:189) call 'housekeeping'), and then coding, theorising and analysing my data. Of course computers do not do the analysis for you: 'they are not a substitute for thought, but they are a strong aid to thought' (Weitzman and Miles, 1995:3). As I have written above (see Section 4.3.6), I had already begun to code the interview material broadly under themes and headings during the pencil-and-paper recordings which were made as I listened to the

interviews on the tape player, and these were further refined and recorded in list form before I decided which parts of the interview I was going to transcribe.

After my 109 interview transcripts had been converted and read into NUD\*IST 4, I initially used these same headings before I began to develop a series of more sophisticated categories. Having already worked with some of the interview data to produce more research papers based on each of the three schools (Swain, in press a; Swain, in press b) I was already familiar with some of the material. This meant that, together with the categories which derived from my readings and discussions, some of my coding categories for NUD\*IST were made *a priori*, while others developed from direct engagement with the data in the light of new readings and understandings.

Like Miles and Huberman (1994) and Coffey and Atkinson (1996) I view coding as part of the analysis where I made interpretations and conceptual decisions to produce the categories. I spent many hours reading and rereading the data, and followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) concept of 'pattern coding' where material was collected and focused into 'more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:65). Writers such as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Seidel and Kelle (1995) argue that although coding is generally used as a means of *data simplification* (or reduction), it should also be used for *data complication* in order to expand and reconceptualise the data which involves opening up and transforming the data by asking questions, and generating new theories and frameworks. Thus, the really important analytical work does not lie in the rather mundane activity of coding, but in the thinking that goes on about how to use and link the categories of data to the conceptual theories. One of the main advantages of using programs such as NUD\*IST is that they are specifically designed to encourage the

analyst to build up and explore systematic relationships among the code categories, and create new categories and theories. During the theory building procedures in NUD\*IST the analyst has to arrange the codes in relation to one another into hierarchically structured trees, and so the product of coding the data is not simply a mechanism for organising, searching and retrieving segments of data, for it also involves designing a whole conceptual framework which is indicated by, and contained in, the coding system (or 'index tree') itself.

Before I began to fine code my first interview transcript I had 68 categories or 'nodes' (which is an address where the codes are located), and after I had completed coding the three schools I ended up with a final total of 119 (see Appendix 4). Some were *conceptual* or *analytic* codes (for example, the formal school culture, the informal school culture, forms of masculinity such as dominant or subordinated); some were *thematic* or *descriptive* codes (for example, physicality and athleticism, school uniform, subordination by difference, school work, playing football); and others were *contextual/temporal* codes (for example, the playground, outside school, breaktime). There was focused coding and re-coding of data into new units, and there were some codes that fell either within, or intersected with, other codes.

Transforming the data into the series of ideas, theories, interpretations, conclusions and results involves the process of writing and representation, and the form and the style of the researcher's account is likely to be as powerful and significant as the content. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) maintain that the process of writing and representation should be regarded as part of the analytical task, which forces us to try out new ideas as we consider our data in new ways. Although there are a number of books concerned with the writing

process in academic research (see, for example, Richardson, 1990; Wolcott, 1990, 1994), as with the writing of fieldnotes, decisions involving writing-up my findings were, essentially, about representation. Although the job of the ethnographic researcher is to make the complexities of the real life that we study simpler so that other people can make sense of it, paradoxically it can also be argued that a contrary part of ethnographic research is to make the familiar strange, especially when it is situated in a familiar place like the school (all of us have our own multiple experiences), in order for us to see it from a different perspective and in a fresh way ( Delamont and Atkinson, 1995; Gordon et al., 2000b).

The move away from conventional understandings of truth and reality have initiated a move towards self-reflexive ethnographies which ‘demand more careful attention by ethnographers so as to improve their accountability and more fully articulate the logic and method through which they claim to know something’ (Johnson and Altheide, 1990:28). While this does not make ethnography more ‘truthful’ or ‘accurate’, it places an onus on the researcher to make their own position and values as clear as possible, and as Murdock (1997:185) writes, ‘where empiricists strive to write themselves out of their accounts...contemporary ethnographers struggle to write themselves in’. Crucially, the researcher also needs to make a clear statement of the relationship between theory and empirical data, and show how the principles of selection (which operate at all stages) in the collection, analysis and presentation of results and conclusions were arrived at (see A. Brown, 1999). There is a need to develop a series of explicit concepts and an accompanying unambiguous language which allowed the empirical data to be translated into recognisable terms within the general theoretical perspective that has been adopted, otherwise the strength of the conclusions will be diminished (A. Brown, 1999).



There is a tendency in qualitative research for the researcher to use extracts of data, in the form of exemplary quotations, to illustrate, confirm and justify points and arguments being made [7]. While there is nothing wrong with this (and, indeed, this method is used extensively throughout the forthcoming empirical chapters) there also need to be statements made of the criteria that are being used for selection so that when the work is finally presented, the research community is able to share in the ways the judgements have been made.

Let us look at this conversation below which appears again in one of the empirical chapters on the forms and types of masculinity (Section 9.9.2). I am using this particular extract as part of one of my research themes which is to explore how peer friendship groups are formed, and how pupils categorise or differentiate themselves. As part of my comparative study I am particularly interested in whether there are any similarities in the resources and strategies the boys use from which I can generalise, and the empirical data from this and the other two schools strongly suggests that the boys employ the concept of ‘difference’ and ‘deficit’ to position boys in the masculine hierarchy. In this case, the conceptual analysis has come from my theoretical readings and orientations and it seems to be confirmed by the data, but as I have written above, there may also be other times when the empirical data may challenge the theory.

<i>JS:</i>	What marks out this group from the other group of boys?
<i>Richard:</i>	They do silly things/
<i>Robin:</i>	Yeah
<i>JS:</i>	Silly things, such as?
<i>Richard:</i>	Going to the toilet with some wet tissues and throwing them at the ceiling...erm/
<i>Robin:</i>	Going in the infants playground/

- Richard:* Yeah, they go into the infants, hide behind the trees, and then they run and bang on the windows in the infants
- JS:* [...] So they do silly things, what else?
- Robin:* They play silly games...like, they chase the girls all the way around/
- Richard:* And kiss them
- Robin:* Yeah
- JS:* But you say, you chase the girls as well?
- Richard:* Yeah, but we don't try and get them, we just try and beat up each other, so if, like, Candy gets some of us, she punches us and that
- JS:* Right, so it's a different form of game with the girls
- Richard/Robin:* Yeah

I coded this extract under the following 15 categories which have four analytic elements (*in italics*): *contextual/temporal* (Petersfield, boys, autumn term, the playground); *conceptual* (dominant forms of masculinity, the informal pupil culture); and *thematic/descriptive* (the strategy of subordination by evoking 'difference'; the strategy of subordination by evoking babyish, immature behaviour; the strategy of subordination by evoking 'deficiency of'; physicality; fighting; relations with girls; the active the use of the body; the use of space; and playing). Once the coding has been completed I am able to compare and contrast it with similarly coded data, and then choose exemplary extracts from the data to illustrate my point. By using NUD\*IST 4 to list the number of times each categorisation had been used, I was also able to gain a sense of the prevalence of each category in the overall data collected from interview [8].

#### 4.4.3 Writing-up

In some ways the writing process is analogous to writing a (long) narrative poem: for instance, these chapters have gone through a process of continuing elaboration, but also

refinement and revision moving towards greater precision and clarification. Following Wolcott's (1994:13) witty dictum that there is no 'immaculate perception' [9], and acknowledging that truths are partial and contradictory, I am still aiming to represent the findings in this thesis as an accurate and honest portrayal of events and experiences *as I saw them*, for it is my unique account and the self is a constituent part. In some ethnographic writings the participants' accounts and actions are foregrounded with the researcher only acting as 'information broker' (Goodson and Mangan, 1996:48), but I wish to argue that it is the researcher who should remain the highest authority for it is he/she who selects the data and who constructs the final account. In many ways, I am acting as a translator. During my period of fieldwork, the pupils in the three schools were busy getting on with their everyday lives, and my task was to translate, or link, the empirical data of what they were doing and saying into recognisable terms using my own conceptual language in order to describe what was going on, and make sense of what I heard and what I saw.

#### ***4.5. Conclusions***

This chapter has shown how the study was designed in a way which allowed me to explore the research question(s) I had posed; it has provided information regarding the methods used, and the methodological issues that arose from them. The design involved a continual process of reflection, revision and refinement where the research questions became more and more specific and particular. The two predominant sources of data in this thesis have come from observation and loosely structured group interviews: various roles of participation and observation were discussed and I classified my role as *semi-participant observation*. The next section was concerned with some of the

methodological issues that arose from using these two methods. I have argued that observation and interviews were both important sources of data, producing different forms of data, with their own intrinsic properties, and that one method should not take precedence over the other. I discussed the validity of interview data which included issues of contamination and reactivity, emphasising that the reflexive nature of research makes it inevitable that we become a constitutive part of the research process, and therefore there is an obligation to make our own values and theoretical orientations as clear as possible. Although acknowledging the textually constructed nature of the data I have selected, I accentuated the fact that I am not prepared to dematerialise the social and cultural, and want my account to be full of the bodies and 'real' lives we are about to meet in the coming chapters. The final section discussed the process of analysis of the data, including the advantages of using NUD\*IST. Analysis was not a discrete stage in the research, but rather a process that originated before, and continues over and beyond the life of this thesis. In this section I also explained how I regard the dialogic relationship between theory and data, and I examined issues arising from the writing-up process, or the transformation and representation of the data, demonstrating how interpretations and conceptual decisions were made to produce specific coding categories by using an example of interview data.

The next five chapters (Chapters 5-9) present the outcome of the analysis and provide, as Denzin says, 'a meeting place where "original" voices, their inscriptions [as transcribed texts] and the writer's interpretations come together' (Denzin, 1997:41). The first of these empirical chapters (Chapter 5) describes the context of the three schools; Chapter 6, introduces the pupils; Chapter 7, concerns the pupils' relations between the formal and informal school cultures; Chapter 8 examines ways/options, and the resources and

strategies the pupils use and draw on to gain peer group status; while Chapter 9 considers the problematic classifying the various types of masculinity on show.

### Footnotes

[1] In order to disguise the school's identity the number of pupils on roll have been rounded up or down to the nearest 25

[2] I also made sure that I attended each school on every day of the school week at least once every term, to try and ensure that I did not miss an important part of school life such as a whole school assembly or a games lesson.

[3] Of course the classes in each school were actually selected for me by the headteachers, and their choice was undoubtedly influenced by the teacher they had available. This meant that the boys were unlikely to be in classes taught by teachers who were either inexperienced or incompetent, and this affected the types and characteristics of the classes I was able to research in.

[4] There were a handful of moments when interviews would be interrupted by school secretaries, or other teachers, causing embarrassed pauses which I tried to cover over as best I could.

[5] Interviews can be occasions when identities are created and/or reaffirmed. Epstein and Johnson (1998:101) maintain that the telling of narrative accounts in interview is 'a way of constituting identity in the here and now'.

[6] Reid et al. (1996) show how two researchers can interpret the same classroom scene very differently which, they argue, demonstrates how the researcher's constructions and re-presentation of events is merely one way of understanding what is going on.

[7] One thing I became conscious of during the process of writing and representation was a growing awareness that many of the extracts of data that I was using to illustrate, confirm and justify points and arguments were coming from the same dominant and/or charismatic pupils. If I was not careful, the same names would keep cropping up again and again, and this was something I had to guard against, and to ensure that all points of view and perspectives were included

[8] However, there was no intention of placing any undue significance on a quantitative analysis of the frequency of coded categories.

[9] Wolcott is actually referring to the impossibility of providing any 'pure description' in qualitative research, and he acknowledges that he first came across the phrase 'immaculate perception' in Beer, 1973:49)

## **Chapter 5      The context and influences on the empirical setting: the formal culture of the three schools**

### ***5.1 Introduction***

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description, and to begin an analysis, of the three schools. Throughout the chapter I examine similarities and differences between each setting, paying particular attention to the main features and characteristics of the official/formal school culture. It is organised under five main sections: the school buildings and their grounds; the surrounding areas and parental expectations; the schools' ethos and atmosphere; their organisation and management policies; and, the headteachers, class teachers and general classroom environments (which includes information on the classes of pupils). Using these same headings, the next three sections examine each of the three schools in turn. Finally, I briefly discuss the issue and problematic of classifying the three schools by the social characteristics of their intake.

#### ***5.1.1 The school buildings and their grounds***

All three schools are situated either within or around the outskirts of the Greater London area, and the physical buildings range from over 90 (Highwoods) to 60 (Petersfield) and 30 (Westmoor Abbey) years old. They provide the backdrop to where the teaching and learning takes place, and embody pedagogical principles and assumptions about the way teaching and learning is organised and delivered inside (Gordon et al., 2000a); but they also provide the physical space where the constructions, negotiations and performances

of identity are played out. Whereas Highwoods is set in extensive grounds which are in use throughout the year, the amount of space is considerably less at the two state schools, and although both of them have a 'field', it was not used as a play area for the majority of the school year.

### *5.1.2 The surrounding areas and parental expectations*

Schools do not exist in a vacuum but are interconnected to wider, surrounding structures and cultures. An important influence that shaped the practices of the three schools' formal culture came from parental attitudes, their dispositions, and the choices available to them. Parents make a difference and so does social class, for class is power and gives rise to better opportunities. The middle classes have recognised the link between examination success and improved career opportunities, and generally have higher expectations of accomplishment [1].

The parents at Highwoods paid a substantial amount of money with the primary aim of ensuring academic advantage and so were committed to the school's high academic expectations [2]. It was a non community school in the sense that the vast majority of the pupils came by car from a few miles/kilometres away; moreover, as one of a number of fee-paying schools in the area, the parents had many choices of where to send their children. Parents at Petersfield had less choice but also chose the school on the basis of its academic performance which was primarily based on its SATs results. Although the school was located in a pre-1939 estate of privately owned houses, the headteacher told me that it was not seen as an integral part of the local community, and there were a limited number of other accessible schools that could be used as an alternative. Parents at



Westmoor Abbey appeared to have relatively lower academic concerns, aspirations and commitments than the parents from the other two schools. The school was surrounded by a series of Local Authority/Housing Association estates and was an extension of the community. Parents here had the fewest number of options to send their children elsewhere, and although the SATs results were well below national norms, they were not very much different from those at the other local schools.

### *5.1.3 The schools' ethos and their general atmosphere*

The formal school culture is entwined with the school ethos although 'ethos' can be a difficult concept to pin down and define. Although it may be connected with the school's values and beliefs, they, of course, mean different things to different people, and I am using it here to refer to the general atmosphere and tone *as I saw it* (Hargreaves, 1995). The features of the formal school culture varied considerably between the three schools, although there were also a number of similarities. Highwoods marketed itself on the twin pillars of academic achievement and excellent sporting facilities; there was a highly competitive atmosphere and the pupils were tightly regulated and controlled. Petersfield also promoted high academic achievement (as measured by the SAT results) and also had astringent control and regulation, although there was a deliberate policy of non-competitiveness. Westmoor Abbey was very different: although all schools would like to be able to state that their primary objective is the promotion of academic excellence, Westmoor Abbey's main concern seemed to consist of being able to cope with, and contain, pupil (mis)behaviour as best they could. This was more of a '*survivalist school*' (Hargreaves, 1995:28, original italics) where the ethos was one of insecurity, and social relations (between pupils, and between pupils and teachers) were generally poor.

#### *5.1.4 The schools' organisations and management policies*

Although all three schools were obviously concerned with pupils achieving learning goals and gaining high academic attainment, the pressures were greatest at Highwoods and Petersfield, where parents would be quick to withdraw their children and seek alternatives if results began to slide. Highwoods, though, was very different from the other two state schools in that it was able to virtually guarantee that its pupils were going to meet academic targets by selecting them with an entrance examination. All three schools set pupils for academic differentiation: the top third of pupils at Highwoods were streamed into their own class, and were further set in maths and French; the pupils at Petersfield were set for maths every day and there were plans to extend this practice to English from September 1999, whereas at Westmoor Abbey English and maths sets only took place for one hour each per week. The amount of homework also varied: five and a half hours per week at Highwoods; two at Petersfield; and, formally, none at Westmoor Abbey [3]. All three schools had their own systems of sanctions but, unlike the other two schools, Petersfield had no reward system either in the classroom or in the school in general. For the vast majority of the time pupils in the two state schools were taught by one class teacher, whereas pupils at Highwoods were taught by individual subject teachers and followed a secondary school type time table of 9 x 35 minute periods a day. They had a much longer day, starting at 8.20 and not finishing until 3.45, as opposed to the state schools which started at approximately 9.00 and finished at 3.30 [4]. However, because of the longer holiday periods, the amount of *curriculum* teaching time at Highwoods was actually around 10 hours less per school year than at the two state schools [5]

Highwoods also placed a far higher emphasis on sport/games . The head of upper school felt that hard sport/games was a good complement to hard work, and it formed a large part of a pupil's school life. In terms of time, it took up very nearly 20% of the timetable, which is approximately three times the percentage time suggested in the state sector (Dearing, 1994) [6].

#### *5.1.5 The Headteachers; the class teachers; and the general classroom environments*

Headteachers and class teachers have a profound effect on the children who come to their schools through the management, organisation, administration and curriculum strategies, policies and routines that they employ, and the ethos and general atmosphere they create. The percentage of female teachers out of the total teaching staff (excluding the headteachers) was far higher at the two state schools: 58% at Highwoods, 80% at Petersfield, and 92% at Westmoor Abbey. I had no choice in the teacher I was going to work with; they were selected for me by the head, but there was a strong likelihood that they would fit certain criteria and be of a certain type: confident, competent and, of course, willing to have another adult in the personal space of their classroom for a large part of the year. To increase affinity I felt that it was important to tell them that I was also a teacher, and that my primary purpose was to observe the *children* rather than them, although we both knew that they were also, inevitably, going to be part of the scene. The power of the teacher stems from their ability to do or act, and although the relationship between teachers and pupils is strictly hierarchical there is no clear separation between powerful teachers and powerless pupils, and boundaries are frequently blurred. Teachers

create their own unique relations with their pupils and I saw all the classes that I followed behave very differently in front of different teachers. Most of the pupils' time at school is spent in the classroom which embodies particular notions of pedagogic practice, and provides ways and means for the teacher's control. Seating arrangements were a way of socially organising space and regulating control, and the pupils usually differentiated and organised themselves by gender whenever possible. The classroom is also a place of competitive public performance and the pupils were also often aware that they were 'on show'.

#### *5.1.6 The pupils in the study*

The pupils' links with popular culture [7] generate images and interpretations of masculinity, and make a major contribution to the formation of their identities as they are reworked through their actions and everyday conversations. However, its effect and influence varied between each school. Highwoods was generally able (with the cooperation of the parents) to keep popular culture outside the school gates and, for instance, the pupils were not even allowed to have a *South Park* [8] pencil case. Petersfield was also largely successful at keeping it at bay, although some boys still managed to wear training shoes (which had been banned) and display a few logos and emblems on bags and coats. In contrast, Westmoor Abbey was, at times, almost swamped by popular culture and this had a significant effect on the informal peer group, and became incorporated into the ways masculine identities were played out.

The number of pupils in the four classes I studied varied ranging from 19-21 pupils at Highwoods, 24-25 at Westmoor Abbey to 34-35 at Petersfield (some pupils joined the

classes during the year). I will look at the pupils' friendship groups, and explore the powerful effect of their own peer culture in the next chapter. The following three sections now look at each of the schools in turn.

## **5.2 HIGHWOODS INDEPENDENT JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Status: Independent, fee-paying; Roll: 350

Headteacher (or Master): Mr Jack Hope

Head of upper school: Mrs Angela Taylor

Classes studied: 6J and 6B

### ***5.2.1 Introduction***

This was my designated upper-middle class school and is a independent, fee-paying, co-educational junior school which acts as a feeder for the senior Highwoods school just across the road [9] [10]. It is situated in an outer-suburb of Greater London. At the time of my research there were about 350 pupils on roll aged between 7-13, which is different from LEA (state) junior schools where pupils leave at the age of 11. There were 20 classes altogether with an average class size of 18. Although the majority of pupils were white there were also a significant number of pupils from other ethnic (mainly Asian) backgrounds.

### ***5.2.2 The school buildings and their grounds***

Highwoods is nearly 90 years old and is situated in an attractive environment; altogether, there are over 30 acres of grounds and the school employs four ground staff. There are two main two-storey buildings which are located around the cut lawns and cultivated flowerbeds of an old mansion town house where the Master and his wife live. There are also a number of wooden huts used as classrooms which were originally put up some years ago on a temporary basis to accommodate rising pupil numbers, and some are now in need of refurbishment. Although part of the grounds around the classroom buildings are covered by CCTV cameras, the site also contains a large area of woods which the pupils are allowed to use unsupervised ('almost without restriction') [11] for much of the year. Highwoods is very well equipped and resourced (especially compared to the state sector), and has its own science laboratories, art and music studios, IT and design rooms, library, and also its own chapel which the pupils attend twice a week [12]. The school also has excellent sporting facilities, and at the time of my research there were six rugby or football pitches, three cricket squares, five all-weather cricket nets, mini AstroTurf for hockey and tennis, two netball courts and a rounders pitch, six tennis courts and a cross-country course through the woods. (The swimming pool and Fives courts are over the road at the senior school.) There is also an adventure playground which is supervised by the teacher on breaktime duty.

### ***5.2.3 The surrounding area and parental expectations***

The local area is salubrious and full of highly expensive properties but, as I have already stated, Highwoods did not draw pupils predominantly from its local community, and most pupils travelled to and from school by car. It was noticeable that many children

were picked up by various nannies and/or childminders; up to around 20 children arrived early for breakfast club, and even more attended a school homework club which was set up for those who were going to be picked up late.

The number of schools in the area meant that parents were in a 'buyer's market'. The parents were paying something approaching £7000 per year (1998-99 prices) and, therefore, had the expectation that their child would receive a high standard of education and attain good grades in their SATs and the Common Entrance Exam which they took at 13. Many staff told me that parents would soon let them know if they thought their child was underperforming.

Fieldnotes: staffroom, am (28.1.99)

*[It is the day after the school's parents evening; there is only one in the school year]. Mrs Brett [a maths teacher] is talking to me and another teacher: 'Sherwin Barker's mum was really upset that he had only got 32 out of 40 in the mock SAT test. She said that he was top of maths last year and wanted to know why he wasn't top now. She said, "I want to see his paper so that I can see the mistakes he's made. I'm very unhappy that his maths has gone downhill and I want to know what you are going to do about it?"'*

#### ***5.2.4 The school ethos and general atmosphere***

The school had its own motto inscribed in Latin signifying ties to the historical public school traditions of learning, courage and leadership. As an independent school Highwoods was, first and foremost, a business: the Master's main job was to promote the school and attract new paying customers, and teachers were aware that their jobs depended on his success. The parents paid money for their children to go to the school to work and achieve, but also to get a broad and balanced education which included taking

advantage of the sporting facilities. Although, as a school objective, academic achievement/attainment had a higher priority than sporting accomplishment, the value attached to sport in the school was unmistakably evident and its high profile and status was materially evident in the magazines, notice boards and trophy cabinets displayed around the school. The formal school culture intentionally promoted a competitive sporting regime which was celebrated in assemblies, and was an integral part of the storylines and repertoires which permeated both formal and informal school life [13]. Competition was also structured within classes (with regular testing and examinations), between year groups, and through the House system, in both sport and work, and other pastoral activities like music and drama.

In the parent's handbook (1998-99) the school refers to itself as 'The Highwoods community', and every pupil's name and address is included in the back section. Former pupils were encouraged to revisit, and there was also an annual day when pupils showed their grandparents around the school. The pupils' behaviour at the school was generally good: I found only a small amount of bullying, and fighting was almost unheard of. However, this is not to say that there was no resistance to the formal school regime or devious behaviour towards other pupils, and, for example, during my fieldwork obscenities were found scrawled on desks, a boy had a history book removed from his bag and flushed down the toilet, and pens and CDs were also stolen from pupils in 6J.

#### *5.2.5 School organisations and management policies*

The school was divided into lower and upper schools and Year 6 was the first year of the upper school where pupils were taught by individual subject teachers and followed a



secondary school type time-table. There were three forms (clusters) of entry in each school year, and one upper school class in each year group was selected by academic ability. In 1995 the school began to admit girls, and the ratio of boys to girls was roughly 3 to 1 throughout the school. In Year 6, there were a total of 59 pupils (43 boys and 16 girls).

Although it was under no legal obligation, Highwoods chose to follow the National Curriculum and took part in the SATs for 11 year olds, although pupil results were not published alongside those of the state schools in the local and national league tables. There was a marked curriculum differentiation between the two classes that I followed, and pupils were also set into three groups for maths and French across the year group. There were frequent class tests, three mid-term assessments, and two formal school examinations in November and June (about three weeks after Year 6 pupils had taken their SATs). The vast majority of the pupils worked hard and some were visibly tired by the end of the school day. There was also five and a half hours of homework given per week (one hour between Monday to Thursday, and one and a half hours for the weekend), but the conscientiousness of many pupils meant that it actually took them a lot longer.

Pupils were tightly regulated and controlled, especially in their appearance, and there was a strict code of dress and uniform; surveillance was vigilant, and even an undone top button was picked up on.

Fieldnotes: Mrs Hope's RE lesson, 8.55 am (24.5.99)

Sherwin Barker is wearing trainers: he is spotted by DH [*the teacher, Daphne Hope, who was actually the Master's wife*] within a couple of minutes of the

lesson starting and asked why he is wearing them. SB replies that he didn't have time to put his shoes on. DH asks him whether he has got them at school, in his form room. He has, and he's asked to go and change otherwise every other member of staff who sees him will pick him up on it. He leaves the room and returns two minutes later wearing his shoes.

Discipline was dealt with by a system of institutionalised rewards and sanctions. The reward system was based on 'signatures' leading to 'commendations' which were given out for good work (effort and achievement) and behaviour; there was a list showing how many each pupil had received which was prominently displayed in the form rooms, and many pupils took a keen interest in it. The commend system had been in place for over 40 years and the majority of pupils told me it motivated them to work harder; however, as with any reward (or sanction) system, there can be difficulties in establishing objective criteria for their conferment and many pupils found teacher inconsistencies irritating. Discrepancies between teachers also caused problems with the 'conduct signatures' which were given for poor attitude and behaviour (also, rarely, for scruffy appearance), but they could be issued both for fairly serious offences, such as hitting someone or shouting at a teacher, to such minor transgressions as fiddling with a pen. More than one conduct signature in the same week led to a 15 minute period of detention (per signature) with 5 'sigs' meaning a conduct mark and a note on the pupils' record, although this was unusual. This system had been introduced by the deputy headteacher, Tim Hudson, nine years ago and many teachers felt that it was not really working. Mr Hudson monitored the number of commendations and conduct 'sigs' each teacher allocated over the year, and there was enormous variations, especially in the use of conduct 'sigs': while some hardly ever resorted to using them, one teacher had issued 11 in one 35 minute lesson. Moreover, the same old pupil faces could be seen in detention every week, and some clearly used it as a way of generating attention and peer group status with almost

swaggering shows of resistance (as we will see in Section 7.3.3). Discipline was noticeably gendered with few girls getting into trouble, and behaviour tended to deteriorate towards the top end of the school.

As I have mentioned before, Highwoods gave a higher priority to sport/games than the two state schools; it took up one-fifth of the time-table, and included two whole afternoons of games each week, and each class was also time-tabled for a weekly session of swimming for half of the year [14]. In addition, there were 26 lunchtime and after-school clubs run by the teachers of which about half were sports orientated. Sport/games was played outside in all weathers, however cold, and one of the games teachers, Mr Perry, told me that he could not remember the last time outdoor games had been cancelled. The boys were not allowed to wear tracksuit bottoms, even in the snow, which some regarded as all part of a 'toughening-up' process. Each pupil was required to have an astonishingly extensive sports kit consisting of 21 items which would cost several hundreds of pounds to purchase (see Appendix 5).

#### *5.2.6 The headteacher; teaching staff; and general classroom environments*

##### *Mr Jack Hope (The Master)*

My main contact at the school was the head of upper-school, Mrs Angela Taylor, and I had little to do with the Master, Jack Hope. When I did see him he was full of jovial bonhomie and looked, and sounded, suitably (and symbolically) imposing in his black academic gown and gruff voice.

*Mrs Angela Taylor*

The head of upper-school, Angela Taylor, also taught science and I spent a number of hours observing the classes in her laboratory. She was in her late 40s, and I was very impressed with her geniality, openness, the amount of time she gave me, and her competence and professionalism as a manager, administrator and teacher. She had originally taught in the state sector, and told me that she had been appointed 3 years ago with a brief to push up the academic standards. Academic results were rising and she felt that Highwoods was 'moving out of the second division', and beginning to enjoy a more equitable comparison with some of the other more prestigious independent schools in the area. As part of her policy to improve academic results she was attempting to gradually reduce the amount of time, and the emphasis, given to sport/games and this had caused some resentment by some members of the PE staff. She approved of Highwood's competitive ethos, as she felt the many competitive events gave the pupils 'the chance to succeed at something', and she used a quasi-Darwinian analogy to explain why the leading boys drew on the resource of physicality/athleticism to gain and establish status amongst the peer groups.

*Mrs Taylor:* If you look who the heroes are in society and you aspire to that, then you're going to make another model in the community you're in, aren't you, which for them is school and their own year group [...]. It's a kind of...it's an animal thing isn't it really, I mean, what do you look at, the fastest runners, the strongest, the fittest, they are the ones that are selected, erm, aren't they through natural selection anyway, and therefore, if you look at any animal group, who are the females looking to find their partners with, the fit, the strong, the active...the ones who look as if they are prime members of the species.

She believed that the National Curriculum and the SATs had helped raise standards and had forced teachers to teach more of her own subject, science. SAT results were monitored by gender and no significant differences were found. She followed the arguments on boys' underachievement and thought that some teenage boys may become distracted as at this age when 'they were at the height of establishing themselves in the pack' [15].

#### *Other teaching staff*

There were evident divisions of labour and patterns of authority in the teaching staff and, for example, although there were 19 women out of a total of 33 (58%) teachers, only 3 women out of 13 (23%) were heads of subject departments. As in almost every school, there were strong teachers and weak teachers, and although it was not a constituent part of my research question to consider the quality of teaching I obviously could not help but notice that the standard of teaching was highly variable ranging from excellent to poor. Some of the teachers had come from the state sector and freely admitted that teaching at Highwoods was, in many ways, far easier, and salaries were also generally higher. The curriculum was well-resourced and, unlike the two state schools in my research, all teachers were given non-contact time: for example, the English teacher told me he had 11 out of the 45 periods (27%) 'free' each week.

#### *The general classroom environments*

The majority of the classrooms doubled up as form rooms, and were also used for other lessons; thus, for example, I saw French taught in the geography rooms and maths taught

in the science lab. Most of the classrooms had old fashioned, opening-up desks, and were rather sterile environments: apart from the art room, very little pupils' work was displayed on the walls. They were places of competitive public performance and sometimes there was no hiding place: for example, results of class tests were generally given out publicly, and pupils were picked on to answer questions and read out loud. Depending on the teacher, pupils could either choose where to sit or their places were pre-assigned (it was about half and half).

As I have reported in Section 3.4.2, the organisation at Highwoods afforded me with a unique opportunity to observe the pupils' attitude and actions with different teachers at different times, and although the pupils were attentive and worked well in the majority of the lessons, both classes were capable of giving certain teachers a torrid time. The conduct in Latin was often particularly poor:

Fieldnotes: Mr Alexander's Latin lesson with 6B, 2.05 pm (5.10.98)

Five minutes have gone and Mr A. is not here. [*I notice that he's often late when he's been taking Five's club over the road at the senior school*]. The class is very rowdy, making lots of noise. There's lots of movement, rocking back on chairs etc. Ahmed is kicking a football around the room. Someone calls out that Mr A. is on his way. Mr A. enters; he has a go about the level of noise and says that if it's noisy next time there will be a whole class detention. Many of the boys call out, blaming Ahmed, and making things up that he was supposed to have been doing. He wasn't actually much worse than many of the other boys. Paddy enters, wearing a PE top –he says he's lost his school shirt. Mr A tells him to sit down [*note the contrast with Mrs Hope's reaction in Section 5.2.5*]. Rex, George and Scott are showing off. I am sitting between Claudia and Ahmed who asks me if I will sit next to him in IT [*the next lesson*]. Ahmed keeps rocking back on his chair. Rex is calling out a lot. Claudia confides to me: 'I wish I wasn't in this class, the boys are so badly behaved'. Nathan and Rex are repeatedly calling out –they're the worst two. Some of them have not done their homework and

have nothing to hand in. Mr A. threatens a conduct 'sig' if it happens again. Rex (and some others) keeps tapping their pens/pencils on desk. When the class are asked to recite a [*Latin*] phrase back, many shout out, showing off (how much for my benefit?). Malik and Callum don't join in [*with the disruptive behaviour*], and I don't think any girls are involved. Finally, Mr A. gives Adam and Rex a conduct 'sig'. They look pleased – more showing off to test the class reaction. George has stuck his pen through his tie. There is more and more calling out going on: the lesson is getting dangerously out of control. So many are calling out. Ahmed is given a conduct sig. for something pretty minor but it's the culmination of much bad behaviour. He seems pleased, and celebrates with a triumphant 'Yes!'. A few minutes later he's mucking about again, this time with Bradley [*who is sitting the other side of him*], making hand signals like rabbit's ears over his head. Mr A. sees him: 'Do you want another conduct 'sig'?' At the end of the lesson Mr A. says, 'You're much the worst class in Year 6 [*out of the three*]. The bell goes and most of the class rapidly begin to put their books into their bags. Mr A. suddenly gets tough and using a raised voice tells them to stop packing away until he has told them to.

I have included this extended extract here for descriptive purposes, and analysis of this type of behaviour can be found in Section 7.3.3.

#### ***5.2.7 The pupils in the study: 6J and 6B***

Pupils at Highwoods were streamed into two groups in their sixth year: 6J was the top class, and there were two other parallel classes, 6B and 6K. Pupils had been together in classes for the previous three years, and many friendship networks survived when the classes were split up. Although they found school life demanding, sometimes even exhausting, the vast majority of the pupils told me that they liked being at Highwoods, and most said that they enjoyed games/sport most of all.

*6J*

There were originally 20 pupils in the class; 14 boys and 6 girls. Although the maximum class number was supposed to be 20, another boy was 'promoted' from 6K after the November schools exams. One of the girls, Louise was actually only nine in September but had been moved up a year due to exceptional academic performance. The pupils found most of the lessons interesting; they had a very positive attitude, were well-committed and worked extremely hard. They were generally very well behaved although they were perfectly capable of exploiting a weaker teacher and giving them a hard time. They were articulate and confident without any arrogance, and the majority had the expectation that they were going to succeed (by passing their exams) and go on to university. Five or six pupils left to go to new schools in July.

*6B*

There were 19 pupils; 14 boys and 5 girls. In general, 6B were not as responsive as 6J: they appeared to find it harder to maintain their level of concentration, and their level of academic performance was generally lower. Although they usually worked well, they took longer to settle down when they came into a new classroom, they found it harder to follow instructions, and there was a tendency to call out more instead of putting their hand up; they were also less organised, and some would often forget basic equipment such as pens and textbooks and so on. However, their attitude and commitment was generally good, although it was noticeably worse than 6Js when they were taught by the weaker teachers, particularly from some of the boys as the fieldnotes have indicated. Two pupils left Highwoods in July.



### **5.3 PETERSFIELD JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Status: LEA; Roll: 425

Headteacher: Mrs Bridget Flowers

Class teacher: Mr Roger Hughes

Class studied: 6H

#### ***5.3.1 Introduction***

Petersfield junior school is an LEA junior school situated within a mainly middle-class, multicultural, outer-London suburb. During the time of my fieldwork the pupils were taught in 12 classes with an average class size of 35 organised by year group. About 30% of the pupils had English as their second language (mainly Asian), and 15% were Jewish; 15% were stipulated as having Special Educational Needs, and 14% were eligible for free school meals, which is the standard measure of social deprivation used by government and LEAs, and close to the national average [16].

#### ***5.3.2 The school buildings and their grounds***

From the outside, the school appears rather bleak and austere, and is housed in a one-story building which first opened in 1939. The rectangular-boxed classrooms are rather cramped, and the windows are positioned at a height which prevents the children being able to see the outside world, apart from the sky. The site is shared with the infant school, and there is a comparatively limited area of concrete playground space which necessitates a staggered morning breaktime between the lower and upper school pupils. Although there is also an area of grassed 'field' surrounding the school, due to wet

weather and morning frosts, it is generally only used in the early autumn, and then again during the summer term. The grounds are planted with flowers and shrubs, and although they were generally well maintained, the environmental study area containing the pond was vandalised over a weekend during the time of my research. I can still vividly remember my initial, preliminary, visit to the school in May 1998 which was recorded in my field diary.

Fieldnotes: Preliminary visit, 2.00 (14.5.98)

As I got out the car, I noticed that the school was enclosed by a high metal fence and I was unable to find a way in; all the gates appeared to be locked and I could not find an entrance. Finally, about 10 minutes later, and after walking around the perimeter again, I spotted a gate with a small intercom system; I pressed the button and told the invisible voice on the other end that I had an appointment with the headteacher. I pushed open the electronically-operated gate, and as I walked up the pathway I looked up at the CCTV security camera which was mounted high above the doorway. I reported to the office, where I noticed the monitoring screen; signed in my time of arrival; and was then given a visitor's badge which I was requested to keep attached to my person at all times. [*Many of these security measures had been introduced post-Dunblane*] [17].

### ***5.3.3 The surrounding area and parental expectations***

The streets that surround the school comprise of well maintained, privately owned houses built in the 1930s. Most pupils came from the local area but Mrs Flowers told me that, although the catchment area was 'fairly contained', she did not feel that the school was really part of the community. Although the parents, supposedly, had a reputation for being 'troublesome' both she and Mr Hughes generally found them to be supportive if 'rather pushy': for example, 31 out of 34 pupils in 6H had parents attend the autumn term parents evening. Both Mrs Flowers and Mr Hughes were very aware that the parents kept

a keen eye on the SAT results; Mr Hughes told me that in 1997 ‘there was kind of a panic in the parents and it was brought up at the AGM and stuff and made a really big thing of’.

According to the last OFSTED report (1997), the majority of the children were above average attainment on admission to the school, and overall, standards met ‘national expectations’. Although the school (particularly the classroom context engineered by Mr Hughes) had a profound influence on the academic and social experiences of each pupil, family/parental ethos, aspirations and affiliations to schooling also, undoubtedly, played a part. Indeed, the proportions of mainly middle-class Asian (the majority were Muslim) and Jewish children may well have been significant with their cultural tendencies of studiousness. Parents were pleased with the amount of homework given, and it is noteworthy that many of the pupils (10 out of the 16 boys) had a home tutor for at least part of the year [18]. The parents had requested a school uniform in the early 1990s and Mrs Flowers thought that it was her duty to impose it. Although, like Westmoor Abbey, Mrs Flowers knew that she was unable to (fully) enforce a uniform, unlike Westmoor Abbey she had overwhelming parental backing.

#### *5.3.4 The school ethos and general atmosphere*

The main ‘storylines’ of the formal school culture at Petersfield centred around academic achievement (as measured by SATs); a stringent control of pupil (and teacher) autonomy by a series of strictly applied rules and regulations; and an anti-competitive philosophy which included games/sport. Mrs Flowers and her staff were well aware that the parents of the school largely judged its success on the published results of inspection reports and the SATs which had, effectively, developed into a public examination in the educational

marketplace. Thus government policies had put the school's anti-competitive orientation under severe pressure and, as Mrs Flowers acknowledged, the school had been forced into 'playing the game'. There was a calculated effort to obtain 'good' results to ensure a high place in the school league tables, with an imperative on 'hard work' leading to 'high academic standards', although Mrs Flowers understood that higher levels in SATs did not necessarily equate with 'raising standards'. Policies/structures had been systematically introduced, and Year 6 pupils began regular SAT practice and revision in September for the tests which were to take place the following May. Indeed, Mr Hughes was reported to have told the class: 'You've got to do four terms work in three' [19].

The pupils were generally courteous and compliant, and Mrs Flowers thought that the behaviour improved as the children got older. As you walked down the school corridor there was an atmosphere of studious calm, and the vast majority of the pupils not only worked hard, they wanted to work hard, albeit for rather instrumental reasons. Pupils reported to me that there was not very much bullying and fighting was rare.

### *5.3.5 School organisation and management policies*

The school had a small leaflet entitled the 'positive behaviour policy' which Mrs Flowers told me was 'paramount' in maintaining discipline and control within the school. Mrs Flowers believed in 'self discipline' and positive behaviour was promoted in classrooms and, occasionally, in assembly with written comments on behaviour cards. The stated intention was 'to provide a happy and secure atmosphere where discipline [was] firm but fair,' but this seemed more of an open declaration, only highlighting various examples of positive and unacceptable behaviour in generalised terms. The vast majority of the rules

and regulations of the school were unwritten, and although most of the children that I interviewed accepted many of them as being intrinsically fair and necessary, many viewed a significant proportion of them as being either unjust, petty, or rather pointless and lacking in any adequate rationale. Some of these had been introduced by Mrs Flowers to gratify her own aesthetic tastes which she called ‘those Mrs Flowers’s rules’, and which included a ‘no pencil case rule’, and a ‘no tying of jumpers around the waist’ rule which she put down to her ‘conventional family upbringing’. Sanctions consisted of missing breaktimes and/or lunchtimes and discipline was gendered insofar as many more boys were kept in than girls [20].

Many policies were introduced in an attempt to improve academic attainment. About two hours of homework was given to the pupils in Year 6 which included an hour of maths. Pupils from Year 4 onwards were set (or streamed) into 3 maths sets every day, and although Mrs Flowers told me in May 1998 that she had no plans to extend this selective policy, a year later she told me that she planned to introduce similar setting in English from September 1999. During the spring term of my fieldwork the school used government money for four and a half hours of additional ‘booster groups’ (one session for maths, and one each for English writing and comprehension).

Mrs Flowers’s ideology was strongly anti-competitive and teachers were forbidden to use any kind of reward systems in their classroom practice. Mrs Flowers also had an aversion to competitive games/sport, and had particularly pathologised football for its associations and displays of hyper-masculine, macho-aggression, hero worship and so on. Although a few friendly matches took place against other schools, and there was a football practice either during lunchtime or after school, there was no school football

team. Moreover, playground football was banned in the autumn and spring terms due to the lack of space *and* the arguments it led to. During the summer it was allowed to be played on the school field, but:

*Mrs Flowers:* ... Even then, I often end up stopping them from playing it because it's just awful; they just end up arguing at the end of lunchtimes and it takes half of the afternoon session to sort out...and it's to do with role models on football pitches anyway so...it's...you know, it's always been quite contentious, in a way, that the football... but I just can't bear what it brings into school...

### ***5.3.6 The headteacher; teaching staff; the class teacher; and general classroom environment***

One class had a job share, and out of a total of 13 teachers (excluding the head) 3 were male.

#### ***Mrs Flowers***

This was Mrs Flowers's first headship and she had been head at the school for about 5 years. In the most recent OFSTED inspection in 1997 she had been identified as an effective headteacher who had a 'clear and long-term vision', and who gave 'strong leadership'. Teachers turned up for meetings on time and were expected to follow the philosophy she set. As I have already stated, Mrs Flowers did not approve of simplistic reward systems, such as team points etc, and when one NQT [21] tried to introduce them, Mrs Flowers's surveillance system soon alerted her and the teacher was swiftly stopped. Just like 'Mrs Flowers's rules' there was 'Mrs Flowers's way'. The unilateral

introduction and enforcement of her own particular rules, which were often due to her own personal tastes and values, were a testament to the power of the headteacher's role. Mrs Flowers had stamped her authority on Petersfield, and, in many ways, it was *her* school.

I found her very obliging and perceptive, and especially interested in my research as she thought that her two sons were both underachieving. In particular, she felt that one of her sons, Dominic, had somehow missed out in 'the equal opportunities crusade' of the 1980s when he was in primary school, and where some teachers had tended to 'lump [him] in with all the other boys' instead of addressing his own individual needs. She had followed the boys' underachievement discourse carefully, although she thought that much of it was government/media inspired. SAT results were monitored by gender and she was quick to point out that at Petersfield boys generally attained a higher score than girls. She was a passionate advocate of equal opportunities and mixed genders up whenever she could, such as the seating positions in assembly. Although she did not regard it as a major issue, she was also aware, and concerned, about the level of homophobia in the school, and she recognised that many teachers were unsure how to deal with it.

### *Mr Hughes*

Roger Hughes was the Year 6 group leader and science coordinator. He had been teaching for about 8 years, and had joined Petersfield (his second school) in January 1997. He was in his mid-30s and keenly ambitious, and during my period of fieldwork he obtained a deputyheadship which he was due to take up in September 1999. He was astute, hardworking and committed, and although I found him a little aloof on our first

encounter I felt that our relationship blossomed over the research period; he was certainly very accommodating and gave his time freely. He was very well organised, and books were marked and returned quickly; he had good relations with his class, and had very high expectations in terms of classwork and commitment, and although he was strict he was perceived by the pupils as being generally 'fair'. One of his maxims was that 'actions speak louder than words' and he believed that, when possible, sanctions should usually be short and swift.

Fieldnotes: Mr Hughes's classroom, 12.45 (20.1.98)

As lunchtime is about to begin, RH [*Mr Hughes*] takes the class out into the playground and makes them line up again. I follow. After standing there in silence for a minute or so the class files back into the classroom and sits down at their tables. RH tells me that the class had come in 'slightly noisily' after morning break and that he warned them what he would do if it happened again.

He had a good sense of humour and the confidence to laugh at himself if he made a mistake. Although Mr Hughes thought that both the teachers and pupils were under a lot of pressure and on 'a bit of a treadmill', he approved of the SATs which he felt had contributed to a significant general raising of academic standards. Although he was largely unaware of the homophobia at Petersfield, he was very perceptive about pupil cussing, and of the resources and strategies used by the dominant boys in the class to establish and maintain their peer group status.

### *The classroom environment*

I remember the first time I entered Mr Hughes's classroom: there was a quiet, purposeful atmosphere and all seemed quiet and content. I noted in my field diary that 'good



professionals make things look easy (Fieldnotes: 16.11.98). Mr Hughes wanted order, respect and compliance; the majority of the pupils also wanted order, as well as knowledge which was presented in an interesting way, and which would enable them to pass the necessary examinations. Every pupil in the class told me that they respected Mr Hughes, and this was generally for his sense of humour, his discipline, and his ability as a teacher to introduce new areas of knowledge. However, we should not be mistaken in thinking that there was an equal balance of power relations here: ultimately, the calm/purposeful classroom environment was backed up by the underlying threat embodied in Mr Hughes and his strict discipline. Many pupils told me that they were a little bit frightened of Mr Hughes, especially when he shouted at another pupil in the class, and this included myself. However, in the time that I spent in his class, I only saw this happen on a very few occasions. It was noticeable, though, that pupils were given little chance to put their point of view

Fieldnotes: Mr Hughes's classroom, pm (5.7.99)

RH is giving out some unfinished art work for the pupils to continue [*which is one of their favourite activities*]. He's not very happy with it – he says he only likes 3 out of the 12 examples he holds up. Some of the pupils have to copy out their plays they have written and Richard tells him that he's already done it on the computer with Miss Blunt.

*RH*: I don't want it done on the computer

*Richard*: But Miss Blunt said we can

*RH* [*Turns on him*]: Who is your teacher?

*Richard* [*nods*]: You are

*RH* [*In a harsh tone*]: Don't question me. I tell you what to do; you don't have to think; I tell you what to do and when to do it.

Richard looks suitably contrite and shame-faced.

The classroom was tightly packed with furniture and there was little space to move in when the pupils are working. Pupils' work was attractively displayed on the wall together with a 'significant behaviour' board, lists of sanctions and the familiar set of class rules, although much of this was symbolic as the writing was often too high for the pupils to be able to read. About eight pupils sat around 4 tables pushed together and these were grouped by ability: although this was supposed to be discreet, all the pupils knew the hierarchical order of the four main groups, and there were other more obvious differentiations of ability in maths sets, reading, and spelling groups. During the school day, the core subjects (English, maths and science) were generally taught in the morning and the foundation areas of the curriculum left for the afternoon. Every time before they began a new piece of work the pupils had to copy down the 'Intended Learning Outcomes' which many (not surprisingly) found an unnecessary and, often irrelevant, chore.

### *5.3.7 The pupils in the study: 6H*

Originally, there were 34 pupils in 6H (16 boys, 18 girls) and another boy joined during the spring term. In the previous year the class had a young NQT teacher and had gained a reputation for being badly behaved. Mr Hughes, and many of the pupils themselves, told me that some of the boys, in particular, had given Miss Iqbal a very hard time. With Mr Hughes, the vast majority worked extremely hard, and many looked weary by the end of the school day. The class had six pupils who were on the school's special needs register: Rod, Denis, Semira, Nadine and Mary (who was actually statemented) for learning difficulties, and Gavin for behaviour. When I asked them in July, the great majority of the class said that they had enjoyed being at Petersfield but were looking

forward to moving on to their secondary school. Although many pupils found most of the work interesting, many also acknowledged that they worked hard in order to get on, and were aware that they were largely judged on their SAT results.

#### **5.4 WESTMOOR ABBEY JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Status: LEA; Roll: 300

Headteacher: Mr Tony Lane

Class Teacher: Miss Sandra Morris

Class Studied: 6M

##### ***5.4.1 Introduction***

Westmoor Abbey Junior was my designated working class school and was situated on the outskirts of Greater London. It was an average sized junior school of 11 classes, with an average class size of 27, and fewer than 1% of the pupils came from homes where English was not the first language. Although 23% of pupils were stipulated as having Special Educational Needs, only 15% were eligible for free school meals.

##### ***5.4.2 The school buildings and their grounds***

The school was built in the late 1960s and is on two levels. It has a 'modern' appearance and classrooms are carpeted and furnished with bright new-looking tables and chairs. The school shares the overall site with the infant school: it has its own two separate concrete playgrounds and a large grassed 'field' area, although like the one at Petersfield, it was

only used in the early autumn, and then again during the summer term. There is an array of security measures on show: the school site itself is surrounded by a 12 foot (3.66 m) high security fence, with a series of coded door-locks, a surveillance camera, an alarm system, and a number of prominently displayed signs around the site warning against the consequences of trespassing, and making it clear that the premises are protected by anti-vandal paint. These had been installed 4-5 years previously for pragmatic reasons in an attempt to reduce trespassing, as well as the occasional unannounced visit from potentially volatile parents. As at Petersfield, this meant that during the school day it was not only unwelcome callers who were locked out, but the pupils were also locked in. Any pupil who arrived after the start of the school day at 8.55 could only gain access via the school secretary. Any timing with the 1996 incident at Dunblane (and its social repercussions) was actually coincidental, but, nevertheless, these security measures presented a powerful collective symbol of isolation and exclusion.

#### *5.4.3 The surrounding area and parental expectations*

Although there were a few privately-owned houses nearby, the school was essentially situated in the middle of a series of Local Authority housing estates; some of which had been used as 'dumping grounds' from inner-city areas in the 1970s, and were also almost exclusively 'white'. When the nearby large factory closed around the same time, there were high levels of unemployment, and associated high levels of crime. Although some alternative means of employment have emerged, levels of crime (particularly acts of vandalism against property) have still presented on-going difficulties. Mr Lane, the headteacher, told me that it was 'a very difficult area to work in', and that there had been an increase in the number of disadvantaged and perceived dysfunctional families within

the last 10 years in the surrounding area. One boy's father had apparently told his son that if he was ever caught hold of by a policeman he should stick a knife in him. Miss Morris said that there had been quite a few fights between parents on the estates and there was a 'known' drug problem.

Although the 1999 OFSTED report found that 'the school receives very good support from parents' it is significant that only 52 out of 290 (18%) actually returned their questionnaire which would seem to be quite a low rate [22]. Certainly Mr Lane did not feel that there was any great deal of parental support, and he acknowledged that some policies were very difficult to enforce: for instance, he had an 'on-going battle' getting some parents to back him on school uniform (or school colours). Mr Lane told me that he thought positive parental attitudes are crucial to a school's general success and said that the vast majority had 'low expectations' and were 'uninterested in the curriculum and the SATs'. Miss Morris also felt that the overall community did not really support the school and recognised this as a weakness that needed to be addressed. Although, from a personal point of view, she found the parents supportive, with about 80% of them attending her parents evening, she estimated that out of 100 visits from parents, only about 5 would be about school work and/or the curriculum. Both Miss Morris and Mr Lane also thought that many of the parents provided inappropriate role models for their sons (and daughters).

*Miss Morris:* If you actually look, if you look at the playground at the end of the day you know the men who are out there, erh, they've all got cropped hair...well let's say 90 per cent have got cropped hair...and an earring...and, you know, big shoulders, and a tattoo and they're macho men...90 per cent of them are...

#### *5.4.4 The school ethos and general atmosphere*

When I met a supply teacher at a school I was teaching in last year (May, 2000) he told me that he found Westmoor Abbey ‘one of the worst schools he had ever taught in’ (in terms of behaviour), and he stressed that he would not be returning there. As I have already argued in Section 5.1.3, my view is that Westmoor Abbey’s main concern seemed to consist of being able to cope with, and contain, pupil (mis)behaviour.

Mr Lane told me that the situation had become critical in November 1997.

*Mr Lane:* When it came to that time in November, it was, for us, crisis talks with staff saying, “We can’t cope as a school,” there were children who were out of control, by our standards, not by somebody coming in thinking oh this is all right, but you’ve got some difficult children, but we felt we were losing control and so we had, I’ve got records of all this, I keep records of every thing that happens, erm, teachers writing a note about hymn practice, about children crawling under the tables and not coming out when they’re asked to and they’re sitting there grinning in front of the rest of the school in these huge public displays of challenging authority.

Although I actually found the majority of the pupils to be responsive and well-ordered for much of the time, bullying was prevalent and the threat of physical violence seemed to be a taken-for-granted component of everyday school life. There were also a number of times during my field work when the atmosphere was decidedly turbulent, and some of the staff looked very beleaguered and exasperated. Life was tough for the teachers, and some spent their time in the staffroom complaining about misdemeanours that had happened in their own classrooms during the morning.

Fieldnotes: Staffroom, lunchtime (10.11.98)

Sandra Morris is very stressed out today. TL. [*Tony Lane*] is away on a course so she [*as the deputy head*] is in charge. She has lots of incidents to deal with –mainly fights, other (unspecified) incidents that other teachers have problems dealing with: e.g., at morning break Miss Miller had a problem over a fight and two kids calling each other ‘fucking wankers’ and throwing stones at one another etc. She [*Sandra Morris*] has to spend her lunchtime dealing with an incident involving Max [*a pupil in Year 5*]. He has been rude to her and is outside in the corridor. He won’t apologise at first for abusing her –finally does. Another boy is outside TL’s office for flicking food; another has flooded the toilets. Melanie Lloyd [*another Year 6 teacher*] looks tired and upset. She has given Andy [*a pupil in her class*] a red card this morning, he had written ‘Fuck off’ on one of his exercise books. Another teacher comes in and reports on a game going on in the playground this lunchtime involving some boys. They are standing on the bench and calling out at the top of their voices, ‘spot the pervert’, ‘the mass murderer’, ‘the paedophile’, ‘the rapist’ and so on.

#### *5.4.5 School organisation and management policies*

In order to accommodate the strictures of the National Curriculum, and its accompanying schemes of work, classes were taught in year groups and this had resulted in the Year 6 classes having numbers in the mid 20s and the Year 5 classes numbers in the mid 30s. During the time of my field work the school was in preparation for an OFSTED inspection which took place in June 1999. It was partly in response to this forthcoming inspection that pupils were grouped by achievement into four sets for English and mathematics for one hour each per week, and Miss Morris took the top set in English and the bottom set in mathematics. Unlike Petersfield, no extra teaching was allocated for SATs in an attempt to boost those pupils assessed as being on Level 3 up to Level 4 (which was deemed to be the national average level for 11 year olds), as Mr Lane

told me that he had preferred to 'spread the money out for the benefit of all our children'. Teachers had greater autonomy and freedom than in the other two schools in curriculum matters and, for instance, it was up to the individual teacher to decide how much time was to be spent on SAT practice papers. There was very little homework given, at least in Miss Morris's class, and the policy was that pupils could ask for extra work if they wanted to. In practice, this meant that very few ever did so, although some pupils took home extra 'revision guides' before the SATs in May.

During his interview Mr Lane told me that his aim was to not to control the children but to make them 'responsible for their own behaviour'. In order to cope with the 'crisis' which had occurred in November 1997 Mr Lane had introduced a 'positive behaviour' policy which consisted of celebrating good behaviour and work, and included the awarding of individual team points. However, as at Highwoods, there were noticeable teacher inconsistencies in their application which was remarked on by many of the pupils; moreover, they also appeared to lose their currency by over use: for example, Miss Morris gave out 12 during one literacy hour for answering relatively simple questions. A chart was kept on the classroom wall showing the number of points each pupil had amassed, and at the end of each half term Miss Morris gave a prize to the leading boy and girl. However, this public acclaim could sometimes be rather problematic and a cause embarrassment to the winners:

Fieldnotes: Miss Morris's classroom, Friday pm, (23.10.98)

Before assembly, SM [*Miss Morris*] gives out prizes for people who have won the most team points (over the first half term). Even though Ryan has the most, SM suddenly gives an extra 15 points to Tom to make sure he wins, and does a similar thing with Debbie. It is quite arbitrary. Some girls seem to resent Debbie getting the reward; Luke mutters 'boff' under his breath (I'm



sitting very near to him). Tom looks very embarrassed that he has so unexpectedly won the award. I wonder how pleased he really is? –must ask in interview. It seems to undermine the whole team point system. The winner gets two sweets at the end of the day; the rest of the class get one sweet each anyway, even though their behaviour hasn't been very good today.

There is further analysis of this scene in Section 7.6.

For misbehaviour, there was a sanction system based on a three-step approach of a verbal warning, a yellow card (whereby a pupil's name was written in a class book), and a red card which meant that the pupil was sent to Mr Lane and given a letter to take home to their parents. The idea was to make the disciplinary system simple, easy to understand and relevant to the boys' lives, but by appropriating the system from the professional game of football it had a further significance as part of the school's masculinising processes. Once again, these were often applied inconsistently by different teachers, and this was particularly noticeable during English and maths sets when teachers taught pupils from other classes. Mr Lane thought that (mis)behaviour was gendered, and in fact only one girl had ever received a red card since they had been introduced in November 1997. When I interviewed him on 7 November 1998 he told me that there had been 54 yellow and red cards given out so far this term, 48 to boys and 6 (12.5%) to girls. During the summer term lunchtime detentions were introduced and this proved to be quite an effective deterrent.

As in the other two schools there were no afternoon breaktimes. Due to the amount of fighting each year group was allocated their own separate day for football and Friday was designated 'no-ball' day as Mr Lane said he wanted to encourage the pupils to 'use their imagination'. Football was not allowed before school and so, although I will go on to

argue that playground football played a fundamental role in the construction of the boys' masculinity, they only actually played the game for a maximum of 1.25 hours a week, or less when eating lunch is taken into consideration. There was a strict rule that pupils were not allowed to enter the school building at breaktime and Year 6 pupils took turns to do 'door duty'.

#### *5.4.6 The Headteacher; the teaching staff; the class teacher; and the general classroom environment.*

One class had a job share and out of a total of 12 teachers (excluding the head) one was male.

#### *Mr Lane*

Tony Lane was in his early forties and had just completed his ninth year as headteacher at the school. It was his first headship but he secured another post during my fieldwork and was due to leave the school the following December. The 1999 OFSTED report found that he [had] 'clear vision' and provided 'very good leadership', and he certainly had a highly visible presence and led from the front. He was a practising lay preacher who had recently been ordained, although the school did not emphasise religion any more than Petersfield. During his interview he told me that he sometimes felt lonely and isolated, and that headship could be a 'tough job'. Like Mrs Taylor at Highwoods, and Mrs Flowers at Petersfield, he was conscious that the SATs had become a public exam and was also aware that the results reflected the social class characteristics of their catchment area. Although he did not see it an excuse, he was quick to point out that the infant

school was on 'special measures' after their own recent OFSTED inspection, and that their Key Stage 2 SAT results, which were well below average, had a 'knock on' affect in the junior school. Also, like Mrs Taylor and Mrs Flowers, he had monitored the SAT results for gender differences, and had found no significant differences.

### *Miss Morris*

Sandra Morris was the deputy headteacher and mathematics coordinator. At the time of my study she had been teaching for 18 years in various schools and had been at Westmoor Abbey school for 6 years. She was in her late thirties and was very friendly and accommodating to me. She told me that some of these children felt that they had been 'written off by other teachers', and that she believed that she needed to show that she cared about them and respected them (which she did). She liked to accentuate the positive and a yellow or red card was a rare occurrence in her class. She had a warm nature and a good relationship with her class, often using anecdotal stories to give teaching points a greater relevance. She had a good sense of humour, and it soon became clear during the interviews that many children appreciated her, and some were genuinely fond of her. She was generally well organised and explained work clearly and patiently. However, she was constantly having to work very hard to maintain order and discipline, and sometimes she looked very tired and complained of having headaches.

I found her intelligent and perceptive, and she was aware that the dominant pupils in her class relied on the resources of speed and strength, and recognised the symbolic importance they attached to their clothing. She believed that standards at the school were rising but appreciated that this did not necessarily equate with better SATs results. She

also thought that there was widespread racism and homophobia, and that the latter was often ignored because teachers did not know quite how to confront and deal with it.

### *The classroom environment*

The classroom was situated on the first floor and had large windows and new smart-looking tables and chairs. There were attractive displays of the pupils' work on the wall, and a list of classroom rules such as 'Have respect for everyone', 'Be Polite', 'Give support to others' and so on. There was also a large notice by the blackboard which reminded the pupils to 'Use an indoor voice', although, as a few of the pupils pointed out to me, Miss Morris did not always adhere to this maxim herself. The pupils sat in places designated by Miss Morris and each table was mixed by gender. Although the classroom could be rather noisy there was often a good, purposeful working atmosphere with the majority of the class engaged in their work. However, many pupils found it difficult to maintain their concentration over any sustained period of time, and it was noticeable that many of the boys would call out rather than put their hands up. Sometimes, Miss Morris found it difficult to gain full control after breaktime or a games period; for example, my fieldnotes (16.10.98) show that she had to ask the class to be quiet 'about ten times' after they came in from games. First thing in the morning was also a time when the class was rather unsettled, as the following extract from my field diary shows which was written on my second day of fieldwork.

Fieldnotes: Miss Morris's classroom, Monday morning registration 8.55, (12.10.98).

The class comes in dribs and drabs, only 12 [*out of 23*] are here on time. Most of the rest arrive within the next 5-10 minutes or so, some throw lunch boxes into the crate by the door. I sit next to Miss Morris, both of us on chairs. The

children sit around us. Most girls sit cross-legged quietly in an inner circle while boys sit around the outside, some amongst the tables and chairs. Most boys sit untidily, sloppily, about 3 or 4 are rocking on their haunches, Luke is wearing a glove on one hand. About 6 boys carry on a conversation between themselves during the register. Jack, Dan, Chris, Ryan, Eric and Robert are particularly noticeable. Miss Morris says 'Good morning' to each child in turn as they answer their names. Some boys are still talking. After a couple of warnings Jack is given a yellow card by Miss Morris; he complains that 'it isn't fair'. After register Miss Morris reads *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (very well). 5 girls have the book to follow plus one boy (2 others share with him). The boys don't listen very well, lots of fidgeting. Nearly all the girls sit quietly and listen attentively (one or two exceptions).

#### ***5.4.7 The pupils in the study: 6M***

By LEA standards the class was small with 23 on the register in September (two more joined during the year). Miss Morris told me that this was a particularly 'hard Year 6' in terms of their attitude and commitment to learning. Last year the class had had a 'terrible reputation'; it was often 'out of control' with fights on most days and many boys spent a lot of time outside Mr Lane's office. She went on to say that the previous teacher had a 'very negative attitude' towards the class and she had a very poor relationship, particularly with the boys. Usually, Mr Lane had a policy of moving teachers to teach different year groups every two years but this was Miss Morris's third year in Year 6 as no other member of staff could be persuaded to teach this particular class. The class had six pupils with Special Needs on the school's register: Simon, Sam, Angela and Cosina for general learning difficulties, Jack for learning and behaviour, and Dan for behaviour. Significantly, only one pupil (and in great contrast to Petersfield) in the whole class had a home tutor and this was Jack for his English. The pupils enjoyed being at Westmoor Abbey: invariably, the best thing about school were 'breaktimes' and 'being with your

mates', and when I spoke to them during the last week of their junior school life the majority felt that they had been quite successful.

### *5.5 Classifying the three schools.*

Although social class was a key variable in my research, the term 'class' has become increasingly difficult to categorise as definitions vary (see Crompton, 1993; Devine, 1998), and gathering reliable data is often both difficult and costly (particularly in terms of time) to obtain [23]. Like many studies, I considered using free school meals (FSM) as an indicator of social disadvantage of the school's intake. However, while this may be a convenient measure, and the raw data is easily obtainable, FMS is more an indicator of family poverty rather than a measure of social class (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000:18), and even then I would argue that results can be misleading. For instance, the table (5.1) below shows that the percentages for FMS at Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey were almost the same, although I have categorised them as being very different schools, with very different parental aspirations and expectations (see below).

School	Highwoods *	Petersfield	Westmoor Abbey
%of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)	0	14	15
% of pupils designated as having Special Educational Needs (SEN)	0	15	23

Table 5.1: The percentage of pupils at each school who were eligible for free school meals, and the percentage designated as having special educational needs

\* Being a high fee-paying independent school which selected its intake, Highwoods had no pupils who were entitled for FSM or on SEN.

I have differentiated between the three schools on the basis of the social characteristics of their intake. Being a high fee-paying, selective independent school, the intake of Highwoods virtually classified itself as upper-middle class. As for the two LEA schools, I used a range of criteria to categorise them: I had numerous discussions with LEA inspectorate, headteachers and class teachers, and I used past OFSTED reports; perhaps, most importantly, I spent a lengthy period of time in the school so I knew the children

well, and I observed and met some of the parents; moreover, I toured around the catchment areas and took note of the housing: at Petersfield, it was overwhelmingly owner occupied while Westmoor Abbey was surrounded by local authority, and housing-association owned properties.

### ***5.6 Conclusions***

This chapter has examined the three research settings. It has described and analysed the physical sites (including the classrooms), the catchment areas, parental expectations, the ethos, organisation and management policies, and included a brief discussion of the criteria used to classify the three schools. Of course, these physical school buildings were transformed into social spaces when the adults and pupils arrived for, as structures and institutions, they only come into existence when they are filled with the activities of people (Giddens, 1987), and I have also begun to describe some of the main characters who inhabit the schools and who constitute this study. For the moment, I have mainly given foremost consideration to the adults (the headteachers and class teachers) but in the next chapter I will introduce and concentrate on the pupils.

The chapter has begun to delineate some of the main features and characteristics of the formal culture in each school and it has shown that there are similarities and differences between them. Highwoods was a highly competitive, tightly controlled school which managed to keep popular culture outside of the school. It promoted itself on high academic achievement and excellent sporting facilities. It was not part of the local community, and as a private, fee-paying school the parents had many alternatives to use if the school did not deliver (academically). Petersfield was non-competitive in terms of reward systems or sporting competitions, but had found that it was forced to compete in



the local and National market of league tables showing academic achievement. There was tight control and an abundance of rules and regulations, and many of its policies and organisation were driven by, and designed to, maximise the chances of the pupils gaining the best possible results in their SAT examinations. The school managed to keep the majority of popular culture outside the school railings; it was not really part of the community and the parents had some other alternatives if the SAT results were deemed to be not good enough. Westmoor Abbey had the weakest academic results of the three schools but also the most social problems. Although there was a competitive reward system there was looser control and regulations, and much of the teacher's time was spent coping with the behavioural demands of the pupils. The school was part of the community (at least in the physical sense), but the parents had few alternatives to send their children elsewhere.

A key argument in this thesis is that schools are inevitably linked to surrounding structures and that the people (adults and children) inside them are not able to construct their lives in circumstances of their own choosing. Teaching personalities, styles and organisations are all important and do make a difference but they are subject to the art of the possible. Reading the accounts from some of the headteachers and class teachers in this chapter, we are able to see that parents play a crucial part in the ways a school is able to function, and different aspirations and expectations lead to different possibilities. For instance, Mr Lane would have found school uniform far easier to enforce if he had had the same parental backing as Mrs Taylor and Mrs Flowers. However, the greatest influence on a school's ethos, its organisation and practices, and on its level of academic performance is its intake of pupils for, ultimately, this is how a school is defined

In the next chapter I introduce the pupils and their own unique informal culture. I argue that the peer group has a very powerful influence on the ways the boys construct, negotiate and perform their masculinities. I look at the structure of their friendship groups, the characteristics of the peer group leaders, and give details of the pupils' relative academic performances.

### Footnotes

[1] Willis claims that middle class pupils are six times more likely to go into higher education than working class pupils (Willis, 2000: xix).

[2] Independent/private schools educate about 7% of the school population (Walford, 1993; Davies, 2000), and in Greater London 12% of the children were in private schools at the beginning of the 1990s. In general, independent schools can afford to offer better facilities and resources, and a better teacher-pupil ratio than state schools, and according to Davies (2000:116), pupils in state schools get only 43% of the funding that private school pupils receive. The majority of the pupils from these schools get higher paid jobs: for example, research commissioned for the Economic and Social Research Council found that 75% of privately educated pupils leave school to take up professional or managerial jobs as against 40% from state schools (Davies, 2000:104).

[3] Homework was given on a voluntary basis to those who asked and, in practice, few did.

[4] These times are not strictly accurate: Petersfield began at 9.00 and finished at 3.30, and Westmoor Abbey began at 8.55 and finished at 3.20.

[5] The amount of curriculum time taught at Highwoods was 892.5 hours per school year. If I use the example of the LEA school where I was deputy head, the amount of curriculum time worked out at 902.5 hours per school year.

[6] The Dearing Report (1994) recommended that PE/games should take up 1.25 hours from a suggested directed teaching time of 20.25 hours each week. This represents just over 6% of the teaching time.

[7] I am including both popular media-culture and commodified style cultures.

[8] *South Park* was a American popular cartoon programme at the time.

[9] About 80% of Highwoods' pupils transfer to the senior school when they are 13 or 14 (Year 9).

[10] There were also a very small number (less than 10) of children who were boarders.

[11] Highwoods Parent Handbook (1998-99).

[12] The chaplain visited from the senior school on a number of occasions over the course of my fieldwork.

[13] Sport tended to dominate the proceedings during the Monday morning whole-school assembly in terms of time and content. It included a number of teachers standing up in front of the school, and delivering a series of anecdotal sports reports which would usually single out the abilities or/and efforts of one or two individuals for special praise. For example:

2nd XI v Southgate House - Highwoods won 4-1

‘Two goals each from Dean Allison and Michael Rainer, his second, a viciously curling corner, saw Highwoods comfortable winners against strong opposition. Our victory was built upon solid defending by the outstanding Ben Davis, exciting wing play by Max Smith, and some cultured passing by Joe Reynolds.’

(Read out in assembly, and then pinned on the Sports notice board: Fieldnotes, 1.2.99)

The reports contained a number of salient themes which included those of leadership, winning, discipline, team spirit, camaraderie, effort, enjoyment, and losing valiantly, which were frequently reiterated and reemphasised.

[14] The exalted position of sport/games at Highwoods was publicly and materially exhibited in the entrance hall to the dining room by the main staircase, where there were a number of cabinets prominently displaying various shields, cups and medals. There was a large notice board stating the current position of the four Houses in 16 competitive pursuits, 13 of which were different sports. In the 1997-1998 school brochure reviewing the previous year, about 14 pages were devoted to sport/games as opposed to only 6 pages reporting on academic curricula. The spring 1999 edition of the *Highwoods Sports*

*Review* contained 40 photographs, details of team members and summaries of results and performances. Appearing in the magazine was an important way of gaining kudos amongst the boys.

[15] During my many conversations with her, Mrs Taylor was frequently making allusions to the rhetoric of the 'hunter-gather' discourse.

[16] The national average for pupils receiving free school meals is 17% (Davies, 2000:52).

[17] Dunblane is a city in Scotland where, in 1996, a lone gunman walked into the school and shot dead a number of pupils.

[18] Although this was mainly for the entrance exam for the grammar school, the 11 plus, which was taken in December.

[19] Although, as Mr Hughes was reported to have said this in September, and as the SATs take place in May, perhaps it should be 'three terms work in two'

[20] Pupils had to stay in one classroom or sit in the corridor outside Mrs Flowers's office. Mr Hughes estimated that about 4-5 pupils would be kept each day of which about 80% would be boys.

[21] NQT stands for Newly Qualified Teacher, usually in their first year.

[22] As part of the inspection process, OFSTED hold a meeting with the parents without any teaching staff present, and parents are invited to fill in an anonymous questionnaire concerning their views on a number of school issues.

[23] Although there is no single scale that has universal support, many academics make the rather crude distinction between 'manual' (working class) and 'non-manual' (middle class) backgrounds, but I had no access to economic data of parents' occupation or income even if I had wanted to pursue it.

## **Chapter 6      Friends and leaders in the informal culture**

### ***6.1 Introduction***

This chapter provides a more comprehensive introduction to the boys who constitute the primary focus in this study. The chapter is divided into three main sections and looks at the composition and structure of the boys' friendship groups; the characteristics of the group leaders; and it also includes a discussion of the pupils' SAT scores as an indicator of their relative academic attainment.

### ***6.2 Pupil friendship groups***

As I have already written in Section 2.5.5, the pupils' peer group was a constituent and profoundly powerful influence on the construction of masculine identities, and each consisted of a number of disparate interpersonal relations. For many pupils (perhaps the majority), their interactions with their peers were the most important part of school life. Found within the overall peer group were the various friendship groups within the classes studied at each school. Although they varied in number and size they were, without exception, single-sex [1], and although they were sometimes carried across from previous school years, and consisted of boys from other parallel classes, they were also constituted by pupils of the same age group. Indeed, pupils who consistently played with younger pupils often risked derogation because they were perceived as being 'babyish', although the main reason why they did play with them was usually because they did not have anyone else to play with from their own age group. Although the boys reformed their

friendship groups slightly, groupings actually remained fairly constant and stable throughout the period of my research.

Rubin (1980) maintains that friendships signifies 'relationships which are likely to foster a feeling of belonging and a sense of identity' (Rubin, 1980:37), which, as Pollard (1985) points out, is linked to the symbolic interactionist's concern with self. Friendship groups are a resource and a point of reference which provide a means by which children make sense of themselves and their surrounding world (Pollard, 1985), and it was clear that patterns of friendship in the three schools were infused with dominant notions of what appropriate gender behaviour should be.

Pollard (1985) was one of the first researchers to show that pupil friendship groups are complex and intricate social structures which have their own shared norms, values, rules, knowledge, understandings and collective strategies [2]. They can vary in size from a couple upwards, they can be casual or close, and can form and develop in many different ways: they may be the result of chance from teacher-directed seating arrangements and academic settings, but are more likely to initiate from, and be instigated by, fellow peers. They may coalesce around common activities, such as playground games, or around specific emotional investments and cultural attachments such as TV programmes, music computer games, sport and so forth.

Of course there are also specific friendships within the wider friendship groups, and these groupings have their own disparate and highly individual features, as well as their own particular intensities, loyalties, cohesion and solidarity. In fact the wider friendship groupings were certainly not always discrete, and patterns were complex and shifting.



Certain groups frequently came together and expanded at certain times and in certain spaces, which provided wider social networks for pupils to key into on a temporary basis. Occasionally, pupils also come together for a pragmatic need for company or to make use of the group as a defensive mechanism (or safety-net) against the threat of both other children (and sometimes teachers).

- Tom:* I was getting bullied in Year 3 [...], it was mainly Jack and Luke, so I started hanging around with Jimmy and Chris in big crowds so they could look after me
- Ryan:* 'Cos Tom was getting bullied a lot and he needed two friends to look after him so he wouldn't get bullied and me and Chris had to look after him [...]
- Tom:* I reckon it's better to hang around in big crowds 'cos if there's someone you know who could really hurt you you've got a big crowd and they're scared of big crowds, and they are, than just one on one
- JS:* So you feel more secure?
- Tom:* Yeah...

The friendship groupings described below came from my own observations, and from the boys themselves during interview. Near to the beginning of each interview I asked each group to help me compile a list of friendship groups within the class of both boys and girls, and although each set of boys sometimes had slightly different perceptions of how the boys' (and girls') peer groupings were constituted, they seemed to find it a relatively straightforward task; there were few disagreements or negotiations, and the groupings showed a considerable degree of consistency. Girls' friendship groups are in Appendix 6. [3]. Some literature suggests that boys tend to form large, loosely connected groups (see, for example, Lever, 1978; Woods, 1987), but while this may have been the case at Petersfield, the friendship groups at Highwoods were relatively small and self-contained,

and while the groups may have been more fluid at Westmoor Abbey, they also consisted of comparatively small numbers.

***6.2.1 Boys' friendship groups at Highwoods: classes 6J and 6B***

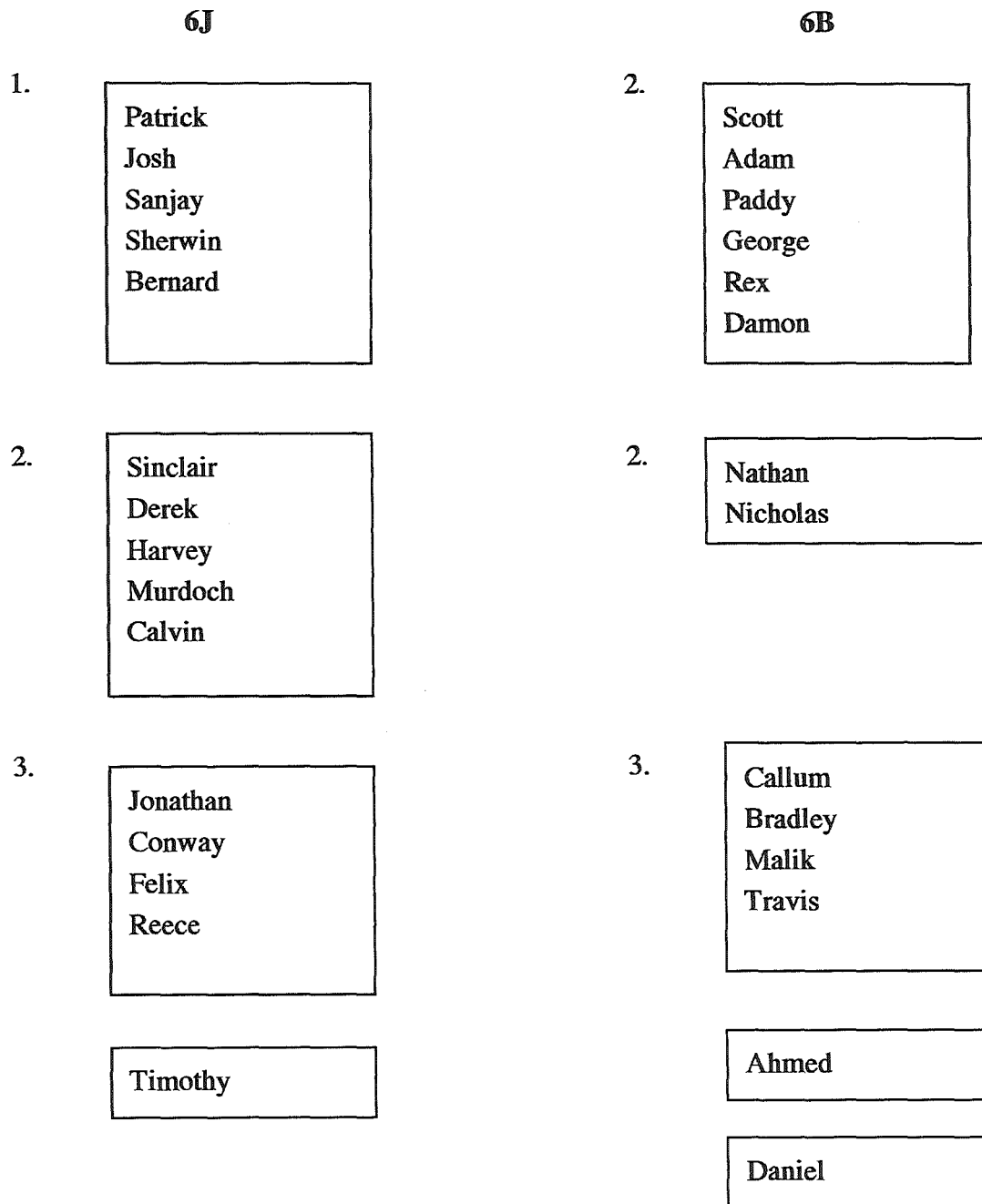


Figure 6.1: Boys' friendship groups at Highwoods: classes 6J and 6B

*6J*

There were three main friendship groups of boys in the top academic set of 6J, but although they were each fairly self-contained, I could find no single feature to set them apart. All of the boys shared a highly pragmatic accommodation to and, at times, conformity with the school regime, and, with the exception of Timothy who was a rejectee, they appeared to get on well as a class and there were no obvious antagonisms between them. The four groups reflect a hierarchy in terms of sporting prowess, interest and participation in sporting activities with Group 1 at the top showing the most commitment. However, the members of Group 2 were also sporty, and most played in at least one of the school A teams in either football, rugby or cricket. Moreover, Murdoch was regarded as the best swimmer in the year, and Derek was recognised by the boys as the best tennis player. The most frequently cited leader (by both boys and girls) in the class, and the most popular boy, was Patrick (although he did not acknowledge this himself), while the other two groups did not appear to have any one particular dominant character. None of the groups mixed with the girls, and there was only the briefest of interactions. It was two separated worlds: the boys were more disinterested than anything else, and I saw no evidence of any boy going out of his way to disparage a girl during my fieldwork.

*6B*

The other class that I studied at Highwoods had three main friendship groups, and there were two other boys who found it difficult to fully integrate with the other groups. The class as a whole was far less conformist or compliant to the formal school culture than 6J, and I observed more friction between certain individuals. Each friendship group was, again, quite self-inclusive, although they also had no overriding consistent identity that I

could distinguish or categorise. Group 1 was certainly the most sporty, although only Scott and Adam could be called 'top' sporty boys, and George and Paddy did not play on the courts everyday. Old class allegiances were carried over from the previous school year and, for example, some of the boys in Group 1 played with the boys from Group 1 in 6J on the courts. Scott was the acknowledged leader of Group 1, and was consistently cited as being the most popular boy in the class. It was no coincidence that that the two most popular boys in their classes, Patrick (in 6J) and Scott (in 6B), were also the two best footballers in the year, but they also possessed a set of highly developed interpersonal skills. The other two groups did not appear to have any leaders: Group 2 contained Nathan who fashioned his identity on an image of 'coolness', and Group 3 had Travis who I found to be the most perceptive boy that I interviewed from any of the three schools. As in 6J, none of the boys mixed with the girls for any sustained period of time, and they kept apart whenever they could. Scott was clearly embarrassed that Claudia from 6B and Catherine from 6K were said to 'fancy' him.

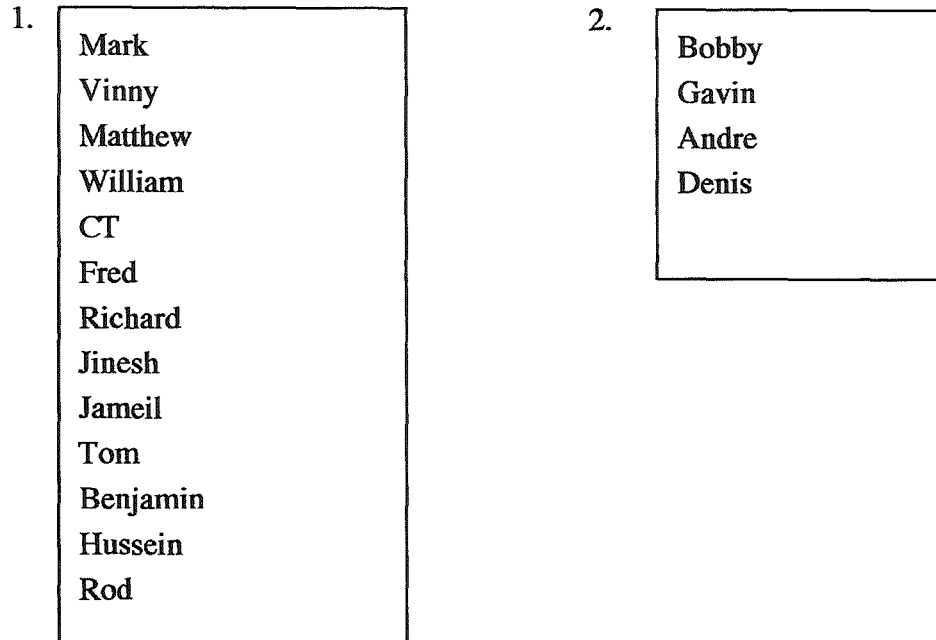
**6.2.2 Boys' friendship groups at Petersfield: class 6H**

Figure 6.2: Boys' friendship groups at Petersfield: class 6H

Although some of the boys (such as Richard, CT, Vinny and Denis) could be described as 'resisters', all of them formed a pragmatic compromise with the formal school regime for most of the time. Rather unusually, and unlike in the classes in the other two schools, there were only two friendship groups of boys in class 6H: out of the 17 boys, there was one large, dominant group of 13 boys, and 4 others who tended to be placed in a more subordinate position (Bobby, Gavin, Andre and Denis), and I witnessed several tensions between them. The main group comprised of boys from a wide range of interests and abilities, and who played together everyday; they were rather uninterested in the girls in

the class, and rarely mixed with them outside the classroom. Once again there was no one discernible feature or characteristic, and although, on first appearances, they seemed to be a close-knit and coherent unit, there were a number of underlying tensions and power struggles and inner hierarchies. There were two acknowledged leaders of the main, dominant group who vied for power and status: Jinesh, and a boy known as CT; then there was rather a disparate, associate group of 9 boys (Richard, Matthew, Vinny, Jameil, Hussein, Tom, Benjamin, Mark and William); and finally, 2 boys (Rod and Fred) who were really followers, and who were more tolerated, than integral members.

### ***6.2.3 Boys' friendship groups at Westmoor Abbey: class 6M***

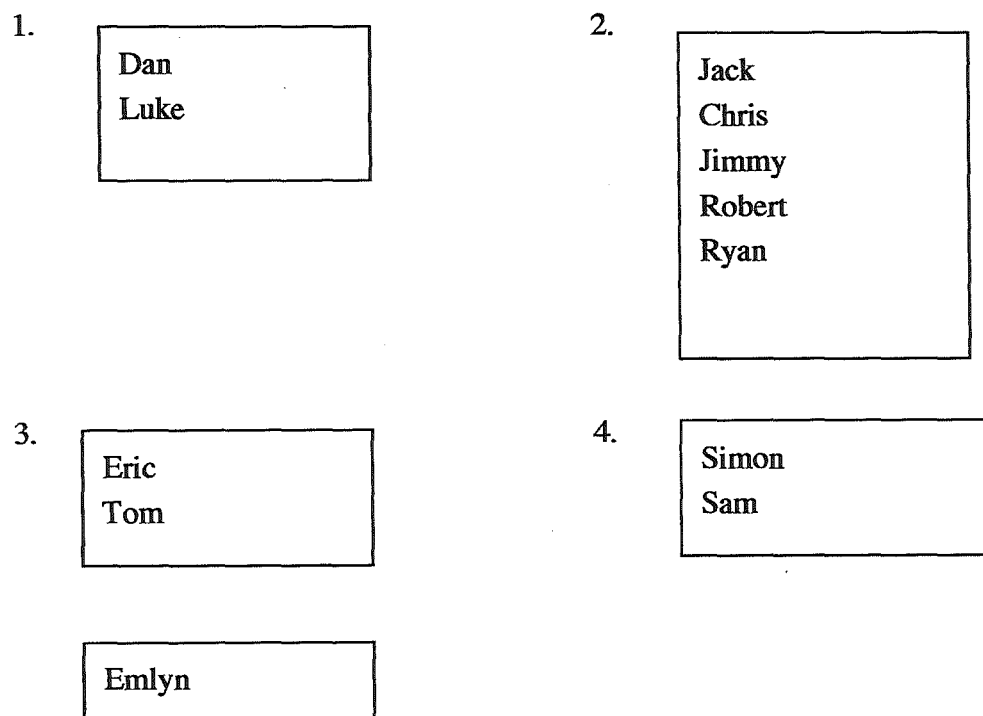


Figure 6.3: Boys' friendship groups at Westmoor Abbey: class 6M

There were four main groups of boys in 6M, and these were far more loosely associated than the groups in the other two schools and constantly overlapped and combined (Groups 2 and 3 were particularly similar and often merged). Group 1 were most frequently cited as being the popular group by the other members of the class, and Dan was seen by many as the class leader, and seemed to make the majority of the decisions in the playground games. The other groups had no particular leader. Group 1 often played with a group of 4 or 5 boys from a parallel class but was actually very similar to Groups 2 and 3 except that Dan and Luke were more dominant personalities and were involved in more fights. In fact, all the groups exhibited the same features and characteristics but to varying degrees, although Simon and Sam were subordinated by the three groups, and Emlyn (who joined during the spring term) found himself marginalised and unable to integrate with any of the main groups. Although derogation of girls was a consistent part of the peer group culture, and boys and girls were mostly apart, all the boys in the first three groups integrated with some of the girls at various times, particularly in the playground games.

Reading over these descriptions of the pupil friendship groups we begin to see some of the difficulties that I encountered when I came to attempt to classify and categorise them as exhibiting different types of masculinity. This is a fundamental part of this thesis and I will return to it in more detail in Chapter 9.

### *6.3 Leaders*

There were three main possible types of pupil leader in each school amongst the peer groups: boys who were a pre-eminent figure of the whole year group, boys who were

leaders within each class, or boys who were leaders within their own local friendship group. The names came from pupil nominations in interview and from my own observations, and the teachers identified the same names as well. Each leader drew on a series of different resources, and used a series of different strategies, to maintain their position which, in turn, depended on the meanings and storylines available. Harris (1998:245) contends that leaders are the people who tell others what to do and they can have a major effect on their peer group in three main ways: they can influence the group norms in terms of the attitudes and behaviours that the majority of the members adopt and regard as appropriate; they can specify the boundaries of the group by saying who is with *us* and who is with *them*; and they can determine the image that the group has of itself. In many ways, they are also exemplars of the dominant form of masculinity found in each setting.

As I have written before, there were two boys at Highwoods who were identified as leaders of the whole year group, Patrick from 6J and Scott from 6B, and they were also seen as leaders in their respective classes. At Petersfield, there was little inter-class mixing and no overall year leader was apparent, but the acknowledged leaders of 6H were Jinesh and CT. At Westmoor Abbey, the year group leader was Sean, and the most frequently cited name in 6M was Dan, although, as we will see below, he began to lose some of his status and popularity as the year progressed. None of the other groups in the three schools was able to nominate a single dominant personality from their own localised friendship group who they were prepared to call leader (or similar name) [4]. Decisions, for example, about what to do at breaktime appeared to be a matter for negotiation, and individuals went along with the majority.



Of course, each of the leaders had different effects on different people, and some boys were more impressionable than others: whilst some tried to aspire and emulate the leading boys, in terms of their appearance, attitude, and patterns of behaviour, others rejected this model and tried (often successfully) to construct alternative interests and lifestyles. Some of the girls also appeared to take little notice of the dominant boys, whilst others were not only keenly aware of who the leading boys were, but they understood the reasons for their authority and influence, and knew what they stood for. For many pupils, each leader had a certain charismatic, 'star', quality which is difficult to define as it is linked to their personality, but whenever I saw them they were generally active and smiling and, judging by the number of boys around them, they seemed fun to be with. They also had the additional cachet of being thought of as 'good looking' by many of the girls, which is another illustration of the part played by the body.

In some ways the leading boys can be said to represent the dominant meanings and practices of the peer group culture at each school for they were seen by many as a living embodiment and personification of a 'real boy'. While some boys (such as Patrick and Scott at Highwoods; Jinesh at Petersfield) had been accorded their position without any opposition and were acknowledged as leaders by the majority of the peer group [5], others (such as CT at Petersfield; Sean, Dan at Westmoor Abbey) had struggled (and sometimes literally fought) to attain their position. Potentially, this brought its own set of problems as the position was more insecure and had to be continually maintained. However, while the positions of CT at Petersfield, and Dan at Westmoor Abbey, were rather fragile, Sean at Westmoor Abbey was reckoned to be unassailable and was not challenged during my period of fieldwork. Although those boys who were deemed

leaders were also often the most popular amongst their peers, this did not automatically follow as we will see below.

### *6.3.1 Scott and Patrick at Highwoods*

It was no coincidence that the two nominated leaders at Highwoods were Scott and Patrick for they embodied and exemplified the dominant form of 'muscular athleticism' masculinity: they were strong, fast, fit and skilful. Both boys played for all the school A teams, and Scott was the captain in football and Patrick was the leading goalscorer. On the courts they were usually opposing captains and were involved in much of the decision making, but in fact they were good friends and there appeared to be no rivalry between them. All the boys knew and understood the link between leadership, status, popularity and sport, and for some, Patrick's and Scott's sporting prowess gave them a certain power. They were able to influence attitudes, cultural fashions and followings, and patterns of behaviour. Moreover, they could choose their friends and some boys felt that they might become socially isolated if they were not included.

- JS:* So why is Scott thought of as a leader?  
*Peter:* 'Cos he's good at sports everyone follows him/  
*Paul:* Yeah, and just 'cos he supports Chelsea everyone starts supporting them  
*Peter:* [...] People are scared of him 'cos he's so popular; like they have to be nice to him otherwise, like, he can make them unpopular

During the summer term two boys came to school wearing shorts, one of whom was Scott because, he told me his mother was fed up cleaning the mud off his long trousers and

patching up the holes that came from all the sporting activities. I asked two boys if they thought, by wearing shorts, Scott stood out in anyway:

- Ben:* No, not really  
*Peter:* He looks good in shorts  
*JS:* Do other boys wear shorts?  
*Peter:* Teddy Jones...but he's got skinny legs, he's [*Scott*] got those big bony legs  
*Ben:* Everyone is allowed to make fun of him  
*Peter:* Scotty Morrison's got strong legs

In other words, Scott was like John from Thorne's (1993:123) study and his unquestioned masculinity, his status and sporting prowess was like 'money in the bank', and he could get away with transgressing outside of the peer group norms without any fear of being stigmatised. It is also noteworthy that the size and strength of Scott's legs has not gone unnoticed with their associations of masculine power. Moreover, although dominant masculinity is coterminous with heterosexuality, Peter's comments resonate with homoerotic desire.

### ***6.3.2 Jinesh and CT at Petersfield***

Although based in the same group, these two were potential rivals and their differences intensified over the year as each struggled to maintain their position. Although Jinesh's status was acquired rather than ascribed, he seemed the more 'natural' leader: you only had to observe the playground games to see that he made the vast majority of the decisions as to which games they were going to play, who was allowed to play, who was going to be on whose side, or when they were going to change games and so on. As with the majority of the pupils in 6H, Jinesh was able to maintain a careful balance between the expectations of both the formal and informal cultures (Woods, 1990), and was also

highly regarded by Mr Hughes. Pollard (1985) argues that competence is one of the most effective ways off achieving status, and Jinesh was admired for his organisational ability, and for his proficiency in school work, especially in maths. He was also venerated for his social and technical knowledge of football and general football news, as well as for the latest computer information, which added up to a kind of *savoir faire*, which Adler and Adler (1998:42) refer to as a pupil's 'sophistication in social and interpersonal skills'. His other great resource was his athleticism, and the restrictions on playground football meant that his prowess at cricket received greater recognition. However, Jinesh's decision-making did not go down well with every group member, and some told me that they found him rather 'bossy'. What this means is that he was esteemed for different qualities by different people.

- JS: Is Jinesh popular, is he quite a leader?  
 CT: Only for his brain  
 JS: For his brain  
 CT: Yeah  
 JS: So he's admired for his brains?  
 CT: Yeah  
 Vinny And his football...'cos CT doesn't like football...I like football a lot; Benjamin, hmm, half...Jinesh... full [*a lot*], he knows all the scores and stuff...

CT's standing in the peer group hierarchy came from using a set of very different resources, and he has to work harder to maintain his position. Although, as Vinny says, CT did not like football very much (probably because he was not particularly good at it), he was tall and fast, but his greatest resource was his strength and, more importantly, his willingness to use it to dominate others with displays of 'macho' toughness. In fact, his status was underwritten by violence.

- JS:* OK, of this group [*the main group of 13 boys*] is there any one leader that stands out or not?
- Richard:* No, mainly Jinesh and CT... everyone's scared of CT, he can beat up anyone, everyone's scared of him/
- Matthew:* He's so tall/
- Richard:* Yeah he's so tall, he's bigger than me
- JS:* [ ... ] So are you saying CT is a leader because he's strong?
- Richard:* Yeah, if you don't do what he says, he'll jump on top of them and beats us up won't he? [*looking at Matthew*], and he never does as he's told

Unlike Jinesh, CT was a potential school resister in the classroom. He had been permanently excluded from his previous school for hitting a teacher, but although he had given last year's teacher a difficult time, and despite Richard's last comment indicating his defiance, CT got on well with Mr Hughes and rarely got into trouble in class. Indeed, a feature of their identity was that boys took up different constructions of masculinity at different times and in different places, and CT, for instance, could change from the physically active and domineering person in the playground to the passive, demur, and hard working pupil in the classroom within a matter of minutes. Anyway, the work ethic engendered in Mr Hughes's class meant that both poor behaviour and not working well were frowned upon rather than admired.

CT also gained a certain kudos by presenting himself as being 'cool' which, of course, is a moveable social construction involving certain presentational skills and impression management techniques (Goffman, 1959; Fine, 1981). Although school surveillance and enforcement of school uniform meant that he could not wear much more than his trainers inside the school building, all the pupils noticed his Nike hat and his Nike gloves in the playground, which he continued to wear even when the warm spring sunshine arrived. In

the summer term, CT wore a colourful bandanna round his head, not only to signify difference, but to symbolise an alternative way of being; and although some of the pupils may have told me they thought he looked good, the majority made more pejorative comments and no imitations ever appeared. Paradoxically, although boys like CT and Scott at Highwoods had sufficient masculine status (once again, like Thorne's 'money' in the bank) to be able to emphasise their 'difference' and individuality, the vast majority of the boys tried to ensure that they were seen as 'the same as the others' in the main group for this provided a certain protection (Gordon et al., 2000a) from teasing and, perhaps, even subordination.

It is important to stress that leaders are not always synonymous with popularity, and some associations with particular boys were based on a fear of either not being included, or on what would happen if you were outside the group. Some of the boys in the large group told me that they did not even particularly like CT but hung around him because he afforded them a certain amount of protection, and they were prepared to benefit from a complicit dividend.

- Vinny:* He [CT] would be popular 'cos everyone knows him 'cos he's big and strong
- Hussein:* Yeah, they just go round him for protection, that's it
- JS:* So they just stay close to him
- Vinny:* CT's stupid
- JS:* CT's stupid!
- Vinny:* Everyone hates him
- JS:* Hang on, you said he was popular a moment ago
- Vinny:* He is popular, but/
- Hussein:* Everyone in our class hates him but he's popular 'cos they just stay around him for his protection...deep down they don't like him

There was another boy, Richard, who without being a fully-fledged leader, still carried a great deal of influence within the class. What is particularly interesting about Richard, in the context of this study, is that although he enjoyed running he was not very fast, he was generally poor at sport and did not enjoy most games, and yet he was able to skilfully negotiate a position of high status in the peer group by drawing on other resources. Like Jinesh he possessed an abundance of *savoir faire* and had extensive knowledge of culturally-celebrated areas of knowledge (particularly in computers); he was also an expert in cussing (especially of a misogynist nature), and was seen, by some, as a totem of peer group resistance to the formal school regime, especially with his trainers, his watch (concealed under his sweatshirt), his non-singing in assembly and so on. We will see more of Richard in the next chapter (Section 7.3.3).

### ***6.3.3 Sean and Dan at Westmoor Abbey***

Sean was the accepted leader of the whole year group, but although I interviewed and observed him, he was in another class from the one I was concentrating on. I became very aware of him because his group usually joined in with Dan and Luke in 6M, and his name frequently cropped up in conversation.

The boys at Westmoor Abbey had a more limited model of masculinity to draw on and Sean's leadership was based on the resources of strength, force, and physical intimidation. Once again, he possessed good interpersonal skills and was also popular with some of the girls, but although he may have been well-liked he was also well-feared

for he was prepared to back up his words with action. The boys understood the basis of his leadership:

*JS:*               Have you got a leader?  
*Lee:*             Sean...'cos he's tough  
*Ian:*             He's the strongest out the lot of us ... he's the hardest

As I have written, his role as leader appeared to go undisputed during the time I was at the school, and to many his position seemed invulnerable and incontestable. However, it was not just his 'macho' toughness that distinguished him for it was noticeable that he had a major influence on the fashionable type of clothing the other boys wore, and he was one of the first boys (the other was Luke in 6M) to come to school wearing combat trousers.

Dan, in 6M, also possessed a wide range of interpersonal skills, and although some of the boys feared his physical presence, he was generally popular with both boys and girls.

He made the decisions and had the power to make things happen, and not many children wanted to get on the wrong side of him. However, in many ways, his position as class leader was the most fragile and insecure of all the boys mentioned above; he had to work hard to maintain his position, and his constant need to prove himself led to some boys telling me that they thought that he was a 'show-off' and a 'big-head'. In the extract below I am asking three boys about one of their favourite playground games called Predator which was named after a film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. It was a chase game based on speed and strength and one of the objectives is to avoid getting caught. In



the extract below I am asking the boys how long you have to hold an opponent down in order to win.

- Luke:* Ten seconds, and they have to get up standing up/  
*Dan:* I've never been caught  
*JS:* You've never been caught, who's the best at Pred/  
*Luke:* You have, I've caught you  
*JS:* There's a disagreement here...who's the best at Predator?  
*Dan:* Tell me when I got caught  
*Jack:* You got caught yesterday  
*Dan:* When?  
*Luke:* I caught you in the toilet  
*Dan:* Did you get me down though; did you get me down though; did you get me down though? [*talking very quickly*] I was standing up!  
*Luke:* I'm not going to get you down in a toilet situation  
*Dan:* I was standing up!  
 [...]  
*JS:* When you play Predator, do the whole class play or just... how many would play at a time?  
*Luke:* Everyone just joins in...and, erm, he [*JS*] still wants to know who's the best sort of...Jack?  
*JS:* No, I don't really mind, it was kind of just a question... who is the best then at Predator Jack, any ideas?  
*Jack:* Luke is the best hunter, he's mad  
*JS:* So is that the strongest, being able to hold them down?  
*Dan:* I've never been caught though  
*Luke:* No, but er/  
*JS:* And you're [*Dan*] the best hider, or whatever you call them  
*Dan:* Yeah, I've never been caught  
*Luke:* Well he has been caught but/  
*Dan:* Yeah, tell me when I've been caught?  
*Luke:* When we..erm...when Ryan or Ian squashed you or something  
*Dan:* No, they let me off 'cos I'm claustrophobic...  
*Luke:* No-one's going to really get you down then

- Jack:* 'Cos, erh [*simulates breathlessness*], 'cos erh-erh-erh-erh, that's why we can't get you
- Dan:* Yeah, that's what you always say, you say you're claustrophobic but you're not Jack are you?

The theme of competitiveness runs through this exchange, and we can see that Dan feels that his reputation is on the line; he twice asks the other two boys to specify the time when he had been caught, and three times emphatically declares that he has never been apprehended. It seems that he is prepared to use any excuse and Jack is clearly unimpressed with his claustrophobic pretensions. Even though Dan has to admit that he is not the strongest boy in the class, at least he could try and maintain he was the fastest. Athleticism was one of the most important resources that many of the leading boys possessed, and speed, the ability to run fast, was a particularly important asset (as we will see in Section 8.3). Sometimes there was no hiding place. On 23.2.99 a trial was held at lunchtime for eight places in the cross-country team and Dan was going to have to run against his main rival in the class, Chris. Dan was always telling me that he was the fastest in the class and on the morning of the race I asked him (perhaps rather provocatively) to verify this in front of his friends.

- JS:* [*To Dan*] Is it true that you're the fastest runner in the school?
- Dan:* No, I don't know...
- Luke:* I don't know, I/
- Dan:*... A lot of people say it's me and Ian but I don't know... Harry's fast
- JS:* Have you ever had a race with Ian then?
- Dan:* No, I beat/
- Jack:* Harry beat you
- Dan:* Yeah, that's in the morning Jack when you're...I got up at 6.00 this morning, that's why Harry beat me this morning
- Luke:* What this morning!
- JS:* Oh you had a race this morning, here?

- Dan:* With Harry  
*JS:* Who's Harry?  
*Dan:* I got up at 6.00 and I was really tired and so he beat me  
*JS:* Who's Harry?  
*Dan:* About Year 5, he's well fast...I beat Ian the other day and he's meant to be the fastest in the school so...  
*Luke:* He [Harry] could have woken up at 6.00!

This was the embodied performative nature of masculinity on show. When it came to the actual trial, a couple of hours later, Chris won easily, with Dan coming third and Jack fourth. In class Dan said he would have won if he hadn't had to take his jumper off half way round; he seemed to forgotten his earlier tiredness. When it came to the inter-school cross-country race the following week, Chris came first (out of about 140 boys) and Dan was fifteenth. Dan lost a lot of respect and influence and Chris gained a lot in terms of peer group status, popularity and influence. There will be much more lengthy discussion and analysis on the connection between speed/athleticism and peer group status in Chapter 8.

#### *6.4 Pupils' academic performance*

Details of the pupils' individual relative academic performance from the four classes studied can be found in Appendix 7. They are based on the 1999 SAT results as this seemed to be the most objective comparative measure that was common to all three schools [6], and there is also a table comparing the total SAT scores for 1999 across all three schools (Appendix 7.4). In Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey I also provide results of class teacher's judgements of individual pupil's general level of attainment, attitude and commitment to work, and their social relations with other pupils which I asked them at the beginning of my fieldwork [7]. I asked them to use a simple grading system of A-

C (A being the best) and it shows a high level of correlation between the teacher assessments and the pupil's SAT scores [8].

Whilst differences in average levels of attainment do not prove anything about the potential of these groups of pupils at each school, and while the reasons for different levels of academic achievement are multiple, and patterns of inequality are not fixed, these figures, nevertheless, show a strong association between the social class of the pupils at each school and the school's average academic levels of attainment in Year 6 which confirms a pattern recognised in existing research (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). Indeed, the inequality of attainment between social classes is one of the longest-established trends in British education, and there is evidence that it has grown since the late 1980s: put simply, the higher a child's social class, the greater their attainments are likely to be on average (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000:18) [9]. Studies have shown also Indian (as opposed to Pakistani and Bangladeshi) pupils doing comparatively well (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; OFSTED, 1999; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000), and while I do not have any figures to argue for or against the saliency of ethnicity and/or race as a factor in levels of academic performance, there were a greater proportion of these pupils at Highwoods and Petersfield than at Westmoor Abbey where there were virtually none. Contrary to other contemporary research findings though (see, for example, OFSTED/EOC, 1996; Epstein et al., 1998; Riddell, 1998), the figures show boys clearly outperforming girls in the two state schools (12.2 to 11.3 at Petersfield and 9.6 to 8.7 at Westmoor Abbey) while performance levels are virtually the same at Highwoods. In fact, in this (admittedly highly limited) study, current gender performances have been turned on their head. Moreover, the figures also do not show any significant association between attainment and the disruptive pupils within each class. Probably the most

disruptive pupils out of all of the three schools (there was little general classroom misbehaviour at either Highwoods [apart from in Latin and music] or Petersfield) were Dan and Luke at Westmoor Abbey but they both performed relatively well in the SATs with average scores of 11 and 12 respectively.

Clearly there are many ways in which children from relatively affluent backgrounds are advantaged, although Gillborn and Mirza, (2000) point out that not all of the reasons for differences in attainment necessarily lie *outside* school. Schools can make a difference but it is much easier for schools to achieve relatively high examination scores when they are able to select a proportion of their intake; where there are high levels of parental education [10] and support for the school's aims and objectives; and, particularly, where there is little pupil poverty for the almost banal reality is that poverty is the greatest single factor which determines a school's academic performance (Davies, 2000).

### **6.5. Ambitions**

Although not an integral part of my study, interesting differences occurred when I took the opportunity of asking many of the pupils to speculate on their possible future career trajectories and/or job prospects. Although it is important to remember that the pupils were only 10-11 years old, there were noticeable differences in their aspirations and expectations of their life chances (see Appendix 8). For example, whereas the vast majority of the pupils at Highwoods expected to go to university only one boy mentioned this possibility at Westmoor Abbey; and whereas eight pupils from Highwoods cited a top professional career (such as a vet, lawyer or accountant), only three did so from Petersfield and none did from Westmoor Abbey.

## ***6.6 Conclusions***

This chapter has introduced the boys at each school who are the principal focus of this study. It has looked at the structure and constitution of their friendship groups, and has also acquainted us with a few of the leading characters who will appear throughout the succeeding three empirical chapters. It has also, briefly, discussed the pupils' academic performances (confirming the strong correlation between pupils' social class and the school's academic performance), and it has also noted that the boys had significant differences in career expectations. The dominant leaders from each class and year group are, in many ways, exemplars of the hegemonic/dominant form of masculinity found at each school, and we can begin to see that the boys establish their position in the peer group by using a range of strategies and by drawing on a number of resources, the most esteemed of which was expressed by various versions of physicality (particularly sporting and athletic prowess in the form of skill, speed and stamina, but also by strength and toughness), but also by being deemed competent, and by displaying culturally affirmed areas of knowledge. (This theme will be developed in Chapter 8.) Further, the chapter has begun to show the power and influence of the peer group, suggesting that masculinities cannot be understood in terms of individual choice but are, rather, a collective project found operating in the organisation of peer group relations (Connell et al., 1982; Mac an Ghaill, 1996). The peer group exercises powerful grip on the formation of the boys' masculine identities, and although children are competent members of their own community, the need to conform to peer group norms is a vital and pressing ingredient of school life. Only a very few boys, whose masculinity was beyond question, could afford to appear slightly different, and for most, 'difference' was associated with

‘other’, and was a main strategy of subordination, as we will see particularly in Chapter 9. We have also seen that the peer group is not necessarily a supportive place; indeed, it often became a highly competitive arena, and some boys found there was a compelling and almost irresistible pressure to prove themselves [11].

Although the characteristics of the informal cultures at each school again showed considerable amounts of variation and diversity, there were also a number of similarities. For instance, the structure and configurations of the friendship groups differed at each school: whereas there were a number of small, self-contained cliques at Highwoods, and a number of loosely formed associations at Westmoor Abbey, there were only two loosely formed friendship groups of boys at Petersfield, one of which contained a relatively large number of 13. Many of the features of the pupil culture will be examined in more detail in the next three empirical chapters which explores relations between the formal and informal cultures (chapter 7), the main ways and opportunities for gaining peer group status (chapter 8), and the themes of domination, subordination and other patterns of masculinity (chapter 9). The next chapter returns to the institutional setting of the school. It analyses relations between the formal and informal cultures, and looks at the ways the boys attempt to negotiate a balance between the expectations and support they draw on from both areas.

## Footnotes

[1] One of the boys' groups in another parallel class at Westmoor Abbey contained a girl who went around with them and played football with them, and was accepted as part of the group. This girl, called Leanne, is mentioned in Section 7.7.

[2] In his case study of an 8-12 middle school Pollard (1985) also devised his own groups based on pupils' perceptions (and which came from the pupils' own names) which were called 'gang groups', 'good groups', and 'joker groups'. However, groupings run across gender boundaries and are concerned with general pupil identities rather than with masculinity *per se*.

[3] The girls' groups tended to be smaller, and more tightly-knit. Numbers within each group at the three schools ranged from two a maximum number of four.

[4] Other names were 'head', 'ringleader' 'chief'.

[5] To many members of the peer group, their position as leader seemed to be the natural order of things.

[6] The scores were achieved from the SAT examinations by adding up the aggregate scores in English, mathematics and science. The 'average' level expected by the DfEE for an 11 year old is Level 4 so an 'average' level of attainment would be expected to be 12 (4 x 3).



[7] There was no general class teacher of 6J or 6B at Highwoods.

[8] State teachers are also required to give a graded assessment (TA – or Teacher Assessment) for the SAT examinations based on the pupils performance over the school year.

[9] Although, as yet to my knowledge, SAT figures have not been analysed for differences in social class, league tables have clearly demonstrated the link between attainment and social class (including poverty). This is particularly conspicuous in the secondary sector where, for example, in 1997, children from the most advantaged groups (classified as ‘managerial/professional’) were over three times as likely to attain five or more higher grade GCSEs than their peers in the ‘unskilled manual’ groups: the proportions were 69 per cent and 20 per cent respectively (DfEE, 1999). Moreover, Mackinnon et al. (1995) reported that children from the former groups were ten times more likely to go on to higher education than those of the latter groups.

[10] Social class and parental levels of education are the most reliable predictors of a child’s success in examinations (Turner et al. 1995; Riddell, 1988).

[11] A UK study by Holland et al. (1993) also found that young men felt the peer group to be a competitive place

## **Chapter 7       Boys and the formal and informal cultures of the school**

### ***7.1 Introduction***

Following on from the introduction to the boys in this study, this empirical chapter is located in the institutional setting of the school and analyses relations between the formal and informal cultures. After a brief review of the school as a key site of masculine practices, I consider the boys' options as they attempt to negotiate a position between the formal school and their own informal peer cultures. Although there are different meanings and practices within both cultures at each school, a main finding is that the vast majority of pupils formed a pragmatic compromise and were able to balance their affiliations between these two areas of support skilfully and successfully. The majority of the boys worked hard mainly for instrumental reasons, particularly at Highwoods and Petersfield. Although many had worked out the relationship between examination success and career prospects and material remuneration, I also draw attention to the risks of over conformity, and some pupils felt a need to play safe. The most difficult place to conform in was Westmoor Abbey, but although there was certainly greater resistance to authority in this school, I found no comparable counter-school movement similar to those described in previous secondary school studies. Although there was plenty of disruptive classroom behaviour, particularly at Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey, I highlight the importance of the role of the teacher, and emphasise the performative nature of

misbehaviour and its use as a strategy to gain peer group popularity and status. Next, I review the effect of the school rules and regulations on the boys, particularly at Petersfield, where I argue that most pupils acquiesced but tended to ignore rules that they perceived to lack rationale or saw as irrelevant. The next section looks at teacher-pupil relations and consider teachers' influence on gender constructions, and after a discussion of the boys' responses to, and efficacy of using, reward systems, the chapter ends with an examination of cross-gender-relations in each school: I found that, although there were differences in the amount of integration in each school, boys and girls stayed mainly apart, and most boys classified the girls as 'different' rather than 'oppositional'.

## ***7.2 School influences on masculinities***

As we have already seen in proceeding chapters, each of the three schools has its own gender regime (Section 3.2.6) and its own ethos/atmosphere (Section 5.1.3), and there were similarities and differences between them. These had a considerable impact on the ways the children experienced their lives at school which, in turn, had a profound influence on the ways the boys constructed their masculinity. I have tried to capture the multilayered nature of everyday life in schools, and I have explained (see Section 3.2.4) how I have differentiated between the official/formal and the unofficial/informal [1] layers of the school, as well as beginning to recognise the physical space as a further dimension of analysis. Although these are messy and intertwined, the distinctions between these layers are analytical, and they allow me to concentrate on a range of resources and strategies, and practices and processes, looking for meanings and values which the boys used to negotiate and perform their masculine identities. The school's role in the formation of masculinity needs to be understood in two ways, for as well as

providing the setting and physical space in which the embodied actions and agencies of pupils and adults takes place, its own structures and practices are also involved as an *institutional agent* which produce certain ‘masculinising practices’ (Connell, 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). These are concentrated at particular sites and involve, and include management and policy/organisational practices (including disciplinary systems); teacher and pupil relations; curriculum divisions; and sport/games (see Section 3.2.6).

### ***7.3 Pupil options in relation to the formal culture: pragmatic accommodation; conformity or resistance***

When children come to school they learn how to become a ‘pupil’ which requires them to acquire a considerable variety of skills [2]. These include understanding the basic features of the pedagogic process, the hierarchical relations within the school, and the appropriate rules and conventions both outside as well as inside the classroom. Pollard (1985) maintains that the two major sources of support for pupils comes from their peers and their teachers, and to enjoy their time at school pupils need to negotiate and manage skilfully ‘a satisfactory balance between the expectations of these two sources’ (Pollard and Filer, 1996:309) which often exert contradictory pressures. Woods (1990:131) points out that this can involve a delicate balance of affiliation or ‘knife-edging’, but in the final analysis a pupil’s options and strategies in their relations to the formal school authority are actually quite restricted: they can either conform and comply; challenge and resist; or they can pragmatically negotiate a path which best satisfies their interests (see, for example, Connell et al., 1982; Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1990; Pollard and Filer, 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998).

### 7.3.1 *Pragmatic accommodation*

Most pupils will actually employ more than one strategy at different times and in different contexts, especially when they are with different teachers, but a main finding from this study is that the vast majority of the boys (and girls), particularly at Highwoods and Petersfield, formed a pragmatic accommodation with the formal regime, negotiating what Pollard (1985:194) refers to as a ‘viable *modus vivendi*’. Although the boys at all three schools said they came to school to have a good time and to be with their friends, the boys at Highwoods and Petersfield realised and accepted that, ultimately, school meant doing school work, and the vast majority were able to balance these two commitments for most of the time. Although there were also many boys like this at Westmoor Abbey, the informal culture here generally tended to be more counter and resistant to the school regime, but many still understood that good teacher reports and examination success were a desirable requirement for secondary school and future careers. Although, at all three schools, girls tended to be more supportive of school authority than boys, there were also noticeable differences within gender groups with some girls at times resisting, and some boys conforming wholeheartedly. Moreover, whilst boys tended to dominate classroom space, and could sometimes monopolise a teacher’s time at Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey, I saw no evidence of this happening at Petersfield with Mr Hughes.

Although many of the boys at Highwoods and Petersfield told me that they enjoyed most of their classwork, the great majority said that they worked hard for instrumental reasons: they wanted to get on and do well in their SATs, and recognised that there was a link between good qualifications and job/career prospects with their material remuneration. In other words, they had a utilitarian view of school and used it as a resource which

provided a means to an end. I would argue that this is not very surprising as, particularly under New Labour, the curriculum (in LEA junior schools) has narrowed, and pupils find themselves involved in discourses of instrumentally orientated meanings around progress and success. The following three extracts come from Petersfield:

*Benjamin:* I want to do well

*Jinesh:* I want nice clothes and a nice car when I grow up, so I may as well study while we can

These boys seemed to be saying that as they were compelled to attend school anyway, they were going to use it as an opportunity for their self improvement/advancement. Richard said that he enjoyed learning (possibly for its own sake or/and instrumental reasons) but, again, he viewed school as an expedient resource; for him, school was a distinct and discrete world, separated from the life he led at home:

*Richard:* I just like learning, that's what school's for, just go to school and learn, go home/

*JS:* To improve yourself?

*Richard:* Yeah, go to school, learn, go home, that's what school's for, [...] go to school, learn, go home, watch TV, forget everything

Some boys said that they did not derive any enjoyment from their work, although in this next interchange there is also a hint of the parental influence [3] on their superficial conformity:

*JS:* Do you think you need to pass exams to get a good job?

*Vinny:* Yeah

*Hussein:* Yeah, definitely

*Vinny:* It will go on your record [...]

- Hussein:* If you get 2, 2, 2 [*Levels in their SATs*] and you get expelled after, you end up being a rubbish man or unemployed
- Vinny:* That's what my mum says
- JS:* So you really need to work? How much of the work do you do because you have to pass the SATs and how much do you do because you enjoy it?
- Hussein:* Basically we don't enjoy any of it, we just get it because we're going to get somewhere in it with life...we're going to get a job, earn a living

Two boys told me at Highwoods that they had never really considered any alternative to getting on with their work saying that 'we work hard 'cos we have to'. Indeed, a significant part of pupils' compliance came from the apprehension of being told off by teachers (see Section 7.5) or having sanctions imposed on them, the most common of which was relinquishing their breaktimes through various systems of detention. So, we should not fool ourselves into thinking the only reasons the majority of these pupils acquiesced to the school's authority were because of parental pressures and their own desire to pass examinations; these, alone, were not enough to guarantee conformity. In many ways, the pupils complied with the authority of the teachers rather than the school: although teachers have the authority of the school institutionalised in their position, different teachers have different personalities, levels and status of authority and so on. The pupils did not always support the legitimacy of a teacher's actions, and those teachers whose discipline was perceived to be weaker were inevitably and calculatedly exploited, even by some of the most seemingly deferential pupils. At Petersfield many of the boys in 6H had given last year's teacher a very hard time and it was Mr Hughes who engineered the work ethic and who had a major influence on their compliance. Although nearly all of the pupils thought that Mr Hughes was a very good teacher, who presented the work in an interesting and lively way, there was a manifest display of unequal power

relations and many of them were rather frightened of him; as Vinny said, 'Mr Hughes just scares you, whenever he shouts you shake'. From my observations, he was a strict enforcer of rules, ever-vigilant, and quick to pick up on any misdemeanour: it was difficult for any pupil to get away with anything. Moreover, 6M at Westmoor Abbey had also, apparently, given the previous teacher a 'torrid' time but were now generally far better controlled by Miss Morris.

Although it was far riskier to display signs of supporting the formal culture at Westmoor Abbey, there were a few boys (and girls) who had made the connection between examination success and increased career options (with the material rewards such as cars), and there were sufficient numbers of such pupils in the class to mean that some were prepared (at least on some occasions) to accept the risk of peer derogation in order to pursue them.

- Ryan:* Some people are like cool and hard but they don't do their work and they're like dumb, and us lot are like that but we do our work/  
*Chris:* Dan was taking the mick out of me calling me a boff and I was saying, 'At least when I'm older I won't have a peddle-and-pop,' [a type of car]  
*Robert:* No, then I got involved and I was walking across the classroom going pop-pop- pop-pop-pop.' [laughter]  
*Ryan:* Dan was calling us boffs and we was going, 'The people who are boffs will have a better job and a better car when they're older,'... and Dan would pull up in his three-wheeler and we'd all pull up in our Ferraries

These boys had negotiated an identity where sporting prowess and doing your school work were not necessarily mutually incompatible, and for them, boys like Dan had got the wrong balance:



- Ryan:* Because we're, like, good at sport and stuff; say like Dan, he goes for all sport and he's not very good at work and/  
*JS:* Right, so for you, is working hard good, a good thing to do?  
*Ryan:* Yeah/  
*Robert:* Yeah, 'cos then you get a better education and you get/  
*Robert/Ryan:* A better job

However, the boys still needed to be careful to maintain their affiliations with the informal culture, and it was a vital prerequisite for a boy to present an acceptable image amongst his peers. Boys not only needed to be sporty, but also to act tough, wear the right clothes, be cheeky to the teachers, and generally demonstrate that they were prepared to challenge school authority. The boys were quick to point this out to me during interview, showing that they were engaged in a careful act of negotiation, and that it was important to conform to peer group norms, expectations and demands.

- Ryan:* But everyone was calling Robert a boff, but he's the one who likes getting red cards and yellow cards and that [4]  
*Robert:* Yeah, I'm getting yellow cards and that and people call me boff  
*Chris:* Well we don't care/  
*JS:* Why do you [*talking to Robert*] get your red and yellow cards then, well you haven't got a red card have you?  
*Ryan:* He has before  
*Robert:* I've had a couple, 'cos I ran out the school gates  
*JS:* Oh but that was last year though wasn't it? [*It actually happened during the autumn term in Year 6*]. So you're still getting yellow cards then?  
*Chris:* No, he hasn't got any yellow cards yet, so far  
*Ryan:* I normally get loads, for talking  
*Robert:* Sometimes I get yellow cards, I got a lot for mucking about, I got moved from Chris and Ryan before 'cos I kept mucking around and telling dirty jokes and that.

### *7.3.2 The hazards of over conformity and the need to 'play safe'*

For many pupils, the safest position to aim for in the formal school culture was to be 'average', while in the informal culture it was to be the 'same as the others' (see Gordon et al., 2000a). In fact, it is a paradox that while pupils attempt to construct their own 'individual' identity, no-one aspired to be, or could afford to be, too different, and they were conscious that they needed to be 'normal' and 'ordinary' within the codes set by their own peer group. For example, two boys at Petersfield told me that although they wanted to work hard there was still a potential stigma associated with being seen doing too well.

- Andrew:* It don't mean you're a boffin but you just got to work/  
*Charlie:* Average...average  
*JS:* So you don't want to be the very top?  
*Andrew:* You don't want to be dumb  
*Charlie:* You don't want to be dumb, you want to be in the middle, be in the middle

Both boys allude to the fear of being seen as too unintelligent, and, for instance, it was quite an ignominy not to be able to read in the final year of junior school. As Graham, from 6K at Highwoods said, 'I don't want to do so badly that I get teased, but I don't want to get on, like, so well that I get teased'.

Of course, being 'average' in the formal culture is a relative term, and changes its meaning and basis from one context to another. If almost everyone generally worked hard and conformed in the class, as they did in 6J at Highwoods and in 6H at Petersfield, a pupil could also follow suit without risking peer reprovment; however, if the majority

of a pupil's classmates did not comply or work well, as was the case in 6M at Westmoor Abbey (and to a much lesser extent in 6B at Highwoods), a pupil would find supporting the formal culture a much riskier path to take and it could bring varying degrees of peer censure and disapproval. The usual defamatory epithets were 'goody-goody' at Highwoods, 'teacher's pet' at Petersfield, and 'boff' at Westmoor Abbey.

Westmoor Abbey was the most difficult place to conform to the school regime as the informal culture was at greater variance with the official values and practices. At times, boys (and girls) did work hard but it often had to be done surreptitiously, and a boy would certainly try not to attract attention to himself. The following interchange lists a number of factors why a pupil could be called boff, and these include being polite, well behaved, and never getting told off; working neatly and finishing tasks early or on time; and wearing school uniform with 'proper' shoes. It also suggests that the term is also applied in the informal culture if a pupil is deemed to obey the rules of a playground game: in a way it was *any* type of conformity.

- JS: What sort of person do you think a boff is?  
 Tom: It's like they do all their work, never get told off, get it all first, get it done neatly.../  
 JS: What else?  
 Tom: Don't moan, listen, do as they're told, don't take things as races/  
 JS: Don't take?  
 Tom: Like if it's a race, they take it as a race; if it's a practice they take it as a practice...they don't get into fights/  
 Eric: Like when you're playing Runouts, if you get your hand in, normally people go, 'You never got me', but the boffs will just go [*puts on an exaggerated and stereotypical posh accent*] 'OK, you got me, I'll just go back to the wall', you know  
 JS: And tell me about how they dress?  
 Eric: Smart trousers/

*Tom:* Smart trousers, smart shoes, school uniform/  
*Eric:* Jumper/  
*Tom:* Smart shirt...

Conforming pupils at the other two schools did not suffer as much opprobrium as those at Westmoor Abbey as there was a closer match between the expectations of the two cultures. Although this was made possible by parental expectations and aspirations, and school management/policy organisation, it was mainly due to the type of pupils who went there. At Highwoods and at Petersfield working hard brought status within the formal culture and had a neutral effect on a boy's position in the peer group network. Indeed, a key point in this study is that it was perfectly acceptable for boys (and girls) to work hard and succeed academically at Highwoods (particularly in 6J but also generally in 6B) and Petersfield without being stigmatised and thought of as non-masculine: in other words, there was no equation of hard work and high achievement with femininity. However, there was a noticeable difference in the attitude and commitment towards school work between the two classes of 6B and 6J at Highwoods, for although the majority of the boys in 6B worked well for the vast majority of the time, many also felt it necessary to present and perform an image of effortless achievement (see Epstein, 1998c):

*Rex:* You've got to be a bit like me and Al [Alex], you're gonna work hard but you can't show it  
*Alex:* Exactly  
*Rex:* You don't listen to the lessons but you do listen, like, sort of/  
*Julain:* You really do listen to the lessons but you don't/  
*Rex:* You really do listen but you make out you don't listen so when it comes to the work you can do it but they don't see that you work hard

This position was more difficult to sustain in the higher academic class of 6J where expectations and pressures to succeed were greater from teachers, parents and peers because success was the norm. In this next selection I am asking two boys from 6B, and Josh from 6J, whether a boy is ever admired for working hard.

- Josh:* No, nobody's admired for working hard  
 [...]
   
*JS:* You don't want to be totally dim do you?
   
*Josh:* No
   
*Adam:* Yes you do
   
*JS:* Do you?
   
*Scott:* No
   
*Adam:* No
   
*Scott:* [laughs] Don't be daft [addressing Adam]
   
*JS:* Is it true that you like to work quite hard, enough to get by/
   
*Adam:* Yeah, enough to get by/
   
*JS:* But you also have to have a laugh as well and mess around?
   
*Scott:* Sometimes/
   
*Josh:* I can't afford that
   
*Scott:* It depends on the lessons, in Latin and, erm, music, we do it a lot
   
*Josh:* It's all right for you, you can...no-one cares if you fail
   
*Scott:* I mess around/
   
*JS:* Your parents do, surely?
   
*Scott:* I mess around in Latin after I got a B, C, I which is brilliant, I don't know why I got a B, C
   
*Josh:* The problem for the people in 6J is that they're surprised if you, like, fail, well it's not expected in 6B but it's not, like, surprising
   
*JS:* Are you saying that there is more pressure in 6J to work harder?
   
*Josh:* Yes, much more

Notice how Adam is negotiating his position with myself and his friend Scott, and how both these boys from 6B deliberately select certain lessons to display their disruptive behaviour. Some pupils in 6J were referred to as 'goody-goodies' from pupils in the

other two classes, but even within 6J, it was risky to appear 'too perfect' and this applied to the girls as much as the boys. One girl, in particular, called Diana suffered more opprobrium than anyone else, for not only was her father the headteacher of the Highwoods senior school, which put her firmly in the formal school camp, but she also worked very hard, she consistently came top of the commends list (see Section 5.2.5) and was known as 'the commends-machine'. She was also the highest academic achiever in the year (and therefore at the top of the normative scale), and she also looked very formal, with one boy describing her as having a haircut that was 'a million miles old'.

### *7.3.3 Resistance and misbehaviour*

The most studied group of masculinities in schools is those boys who reject school values. See, for example, Willis (1977) with the 'lads'; Kessler et al. (1985) with the 'bloods'; Walker (1988) with the 'footballers' and the 'competitors'; Mac an Ghaill (1994) with the 'macho lads'; Parker (1996a) with the 'hard boys'; and Sewell (1997) with the 'rebels' [5]. Although some of these groups are less hostile to school than others, they all pursue a continuous belligerent and recalcitrant style of conduct. One of the most comprehensive pictures of this type of masculinity is Willis's (1977) study, and indeed Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) argue that it has acted as a prototype for others. The 'lads' renounced the mental for the manual and the teachers, who had little knowledge of the world the boys respected, were dismissed as 'wankers'. Nearly twenty years later Mac an Ghaill's influential study saw a group of boys who he called the 'macho lads' who felt dominated, alienated and belittled, and so, consequently, consciously decided to reject the school system (the curriculum, rules and regulations) in favour of being tough and 'hard' which for them involved 'fighting, fucking, and football'.

However, both these studies are set in the secondary school and Willis, for instance, uses the local labour market for his frame of analysis. This has much less relevance for the boys in my schools, and in fact I did not find any comparable groups to these boys (who were consistently aggressively hostile to school authority) in *any* of the three schools.

While there has been empirical work into pupils resisting school authority in the primary school (see, for example, Pollard, 1985; Jordan, 1995; Skelton, 1996, 1997; and Connolly, 1998), the attitudes of the pupils in these studies also differed from the boys in my schools (in particular, Westmoor Abbey) as I will discuss below (see Section 7.3.4). Although writers such as Connell (2000) make the point that boys are more likely to turn to rule-breaking when they have a deficit of other resources to form their masculinity, I wish to argue that the boys who were the most confrontational in this study used rule-breaking alongside, or as part of, a number of other resources. They did not turn to rule-breaking because they had nothing else; it was just one dimension in the performance of their masculine identity.

Although I would contend that all pupils are involved in the relations of (the schools') control and (the pupils') resistance (Epstein and Johnson, 1998), and all are engaged in strategies of intransigence to varying degrees, the majority positioned themselves well within the parameters between wholehearted conformity and outright rebellion. This is not to say that many boys were not sometimes badly behaved, but they tended to be more localised 'contestations' (Aggleton and Whitty, 1985) against individuals representing authority (usually teachers, midday assistants etc), rather than outright resistance to the values of the school.

Classroom disruption is one of the most compelling issues in the day-day management in schools and I saw many cases of poor classroom behaviour during my fieldwork, particularly at Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey. These came mainly, but not exclusively, from boys and there were a number of instances when I saw direct challenges to a teacher's authority. The causes of boys' disruptive behaviour come from a diverse and complex set of motivations and desires, which may be connected to, and include, a craving for recognition, a rejection of authority, a testing of regulatory boundaries, a feeling of failure and so on, but a central part comes from boys need to gain and establish an acceptable, and public, form of masculine identity within the peer group (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998:176). This is inextricably linked to the performative dimension of masculinity, and the fundamental need to gain peer group status which is a theme that I will develop in the next chapter.

At Highwoods there were a few boys (principally Rex, Daman and Nathan from 6B) who used the strategy of disrupting lessons as a means to achieve popularity and prestige. The main tactics came from answering back, and by generally acting in a way that would generate a laugh (see Francis, 1998). This involved performers and spectators and sometimes even rather ordinary performances could be celebrated by the peer group community. At Highwoods, the performative aspect was recognised and understood by many of the boys, and in the following interchange Travis's last comment is particularly perceptive.

- JS:* Why do you think certain people do misbehave in certain lessons?  
*Bradley:* 'Cos they think they're really cool  
*JS:* What do you mean by that, I mean I think I know what you mean but can you explain?  
*Bradley:* They think they're really good by being stupid



- JS:* Right, but why wouldn't they misbehave in, say, Mr Regan's English lesson because he's quite strict. Travis, do you agree?
- Travis:* Er, no, they just want to entertain the class and get more popular so more people want to listen to their jokes

Although these performances were at this school, essentially, for the benefit of the boys, the girls also understood what was going on. In the conversation below I am asking two girls why they think Rex sets out to disrupt certain lessons:

- JS:* Why does he misbehave, sometimes?
- Claudia:* He's encouraged by other people/
- Ingrid:* When he's encouraged/
- Claudia:* And he's like really big and strong and like/
- JS:* Yeah, so who encourages him?
- Claudia:* Like all the boys/
- Ingrid:* Some other boys/
- Claudia:* If he does something naughty they go like, 'Go Rex,'
- Ingrid:* And that encourages him even more
- JS:* So does he, like, perform?
- Claudia:* Yeah, and in Latin he's so naughty, he's the naughtiest out of all the boys there, he goes, 'Can you jump on your chair or sit under the table?'
- JS:* Is this before Mr Atkinson arrives?
- Ingrid:* No, it's while he's there
- Claudia:* 'Cos Mr Atkinson, he's not...
- JS:* He's a very nice man isn't he?
- Claudia:* Yeah, and he doesn't shout that much...only when he's really had enough, and Rex is really clever in Latin/
- JS:* Does he know quite a lot/
- Ingrid:* Mr Atkinson gives loads of conducts sigs/
- Claudia:* He doesn't shout that much
- JS:* Does Rex mind having conduct sigs?
- Claudia:* No, 'cos he always gets them, he goes, like, 'Ooh,'/
- Ingrid:* But then he just does it again
- JS:* So it doesn't really work for Rex

*Claudia:* No

The fact that I point out during the interview these disruptive ‘performances’ only occur in certain lessons indicates that the teacher was often part of the context for the unruly behaviour. As Daman (from 6B) told me, ‘most of us know that we can get away with it if we do something’, and the boys were astutely aware of the classes they could ‘get away with it’, and many chose their moments carefully. Of course, the options to exercise agency through resistance and disruption were still there in the other lessons/classes, but the boys had to think carefully about the consequences of their actions [6]. The second part of the interview also indicates that some boys, like Rex, actually turn the school’s system of sanctions to their own advantage, for by challenging the rules and receiving more disciplinary actions than the others, and being able to show a certain air of nonchalance when faced with a teacher’s authority, a boy could enhance popularity and status amongst the peer group (Miller, 1958; Adler and Adler, 1998).

There is, of course, a profound difference between boys who misbehave and disrupt some of the lessons, and boys who actively resist school authority on a regular basis. In general, the transgressions at Highwoods came from a minority of individuals and were of a comparatively minor nature: this was no counter culture.

As I have maintained above, the authority encapsulated by Mr Hughes virtually closed down the option of misbehaving in 6H at Petersfield, and when any pupil did try to challenge his domination they almost invariably came off worse. One of the few boys in the class who I have classed as a resister at this school was a boy whom we have already come across called Richard, who on our very first meeting announced to me that he was

‘really naughty’; he told me that he deliberately set out to try and challenge and subvert the system, and this was a theme I picked up in interview a few weeks later:

- JS:* So do you find that is a like a sort of challenge, to see how much you can get away with?
- Richard:* Yeah, yeah...it's just life
- JS:* It's just life [*I laugh*]
- Richard:* Try and beat the teachers
- JS:* Is it to try and beat the system is it?
- Richard:* Yeah
- JS:* Yeah...and you do fairly well actually
- Richard:* And since I've had Mr Hughes I've learnt that I can't...I beat all the other teachers, apart from Mrs Flowers and Mr Hughes/
- Tom:* Yeah
- Richard:* You want to see him...and he goes, 'If you trying to beat me, you will not win,'
- JS:* And is he right then?
- Richard:* Yeah, [*laughs*] yeah

Richard actually seemed to respect Mr Hughes for his observational and deductive powers and was an interesting case in that he actually liked school; he worked hard and enjoyed learning, he attained three Level 5's [7] in the SATs, and was the only boy in the class to pass the eleven plus.

However, I did not discern any counter culture at Petersfield and, like Highwoods, most of the misbehaviour came from a few individuals and was of a relatively trivial nature. Out of a total of 35 pupils in the class of 6H, there were only four others (CT, Vinny, Jameil from the dominant group, and Denis from the subordinate group) who could be described as 'resisters' even though they all worked hard and wished to use the school to succeed academically. In the first extract below Richard has interpreted the dominant

group as being anti-school, although this does not come through in the other interviews with other group members, and when he talks about 'most people' I would suggest that he only means the two or three boys mentioned above. His construction of himself as 'rebel' may well have more to do with his presentation of image to me as an adult researcher.

*Richard:* Most people in these boy groups [*pointing to the large group of boys in my field diary*] do mostly everything you're not allowed to do in the school rules, but we don't get found out 'cos we have ways of hiding it and no-one finds us...

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*Richard:* We do things on the school rules that you're not allowed, like physical/

*Matthew:* Violence/

*Richard:* Violence or verbal, but every one does it

*JS:* But do you get into trouble?

*Ricahrd:* Sometimes/

*Matthew:* Sometimes

*JS:* Or it's rare that you get caught?

*Richard:* I say swear words every day, I've done that since I was about 7 years old, I haven't ever managed a day without swearing, even if I say it in my head

*JS:* Do most people swear in the class? Is there quite a lot of swearing in class?

*Ricahrd:* I swear loads of times, don't I [*to Matthew*] in the class? - I've only been caught once

For most of the time much of Richard's resistance to the school regime manifested itself in subtle and indirect displays of rule breaking, and as I have maintained above, these were, ultimately, relatively inconsequential and insignificant: for example, he wore a watch under his sleeve and he did not sing in assembly. Although he was also involved

in a seemingly nasty fight with another boy from the class after school, this appeared to be a 'one-off' event. His main way of demonstrating his resistance was shown in the trainers that he managed to wear everyday. His mother had written a note to Mr Hughes to explain that her son needed to wear trainers because he had 'foot' problems when he wore shoes. It was significant that I found this out from Mr Hughes, and I am making the assumption that Richard did not tell me this as wearing his trainers was part of his image as 'rebel' and 'anti-school'.

#### *7.3.4 A counter school culture?*

There was certainly more of a counter school culture at Westmoor Abbey, and pupil misconduct and disorder at this school is a persistent theme throughout these empirical chapters. However, although the school undoubtedly had a greater number of pupils who resisted the school regime with far greater frequency than the other two schools, the vast majority of the pupils told me that they enjoyed being at school and not one told me they 'hated' it, or felt school was 'a complete waste of time' as some of the 'gang' groups did in Pollard's (1985) study [8]. Although the best thing for them about school was being with their friends, this was also the case for many of the pupils at the other two schools, particularly at Petersfield. In many ways these boys at Westmoor Abbey were different from the counter school cultures in some of the other studies cited above: the primary difference was that this was not a subculture of masculinity, but rather a representation of the whole pupil culture and its principal features were practised by many of the girls as well. Although there were similarities between the majority of the boys (and also some of the girls) and the 'macho lads' in Mac an Ghail's (1994) study, and they defined themselves by some of the same key social practices (such as acting tough, having a

laugh, being sporty, looking smart by wearing fashionable clothes/trainers, and having a good time), the difference was that they were not in continual conflict with the institutional authority of the school. The boys were not specifically anti-school and certainly not anti-teacher: they may have resented the jurisdictional power invested in the headteacher, Mr Lane, but they accepted and respected Miss Morris's authority for much of the time, the majority liked her, and were even fond of her. The vast majority were also prepared to admit if they had done something that was 'out of order', and conceded that at least some sanctions used against them were actually fair. This is not to say that at times there was not a great deal of class disruption and misbehaviour, or that the pupils did not find some of the work to be a meaningless chore, but they enjoyed certain activities and there were also many times when the whole class worked well. There was also a grudging recognition that school was a place where you could 'learn things' and the vast majority certainly wanted to do well in their SATs.

#### ***7.4 Rules and regulations***

As I have argued in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2.3) all schools are, essentially, conservative regulatory institutions, and Mac an Ghaill (1994) points out that alongside the official three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic, there are the three more unofficial Rs of rules, routines and regulations. The school is also characterised by control and surveillance, and as many formal school practices are concerned with the control of bodily actions and behaviour, it is, therefore, hardly surprising that much of the resistance to the school regime has a physical, embodied dimension and expression (Gordon et al., 2000a). As soon as pupils come to school they begin to learn what is acceptable and appropriate in relation to their bodies: how to sit, how to move, how to speak and do forth.

The school with the greatest number of rules and regulations was Petersfield, and I have categorised them into three areas covering the pupils' appearance/uniform, the curriculum/classroom, and the playground and the dining hall, but all are connected with the attempt to control the body. I list a few of them below by way of example: for school uniform, the pupils were required to wear white collars on shirts or polo-shirts *inside* a Petersfield sweatshirt, black/grey trousers or skirt, and black shoes, with training shoes (trainers) generally prohibited; for curriculum/classroom matters, they had to write in black ink, were not permitted their own pencil case, and were not allowed to read certain books such as 'Goose-bumps', 'Point Horror' and Roald Dahl; in the playground, they had to line up at the end of the morning and lunchtime breaktimes in a straight line without talking, and were not allowed to play or swap conkers, pop-group/football stickers etc, play any physical contact games (the favourite was a chasing game called 'Bulldog'), any ball games using feet, including football, and although tennis balls were usually allowed, games such as cricket could only be played by using hands instead of bats. No sweets or crisps were permitted to be eaten at breaktime, and this meant that, on some days when they were on late lunch, the Year 6 pupils had to wait until 1.10 to eat anything. In the dining hall itself, the pupils were required to put their hand up when they had finished eating, and seek permission to leave from one of the midday supervisors.

Some of the rules were introduced for spatial and safety reasons such as the no-conker rule; others were inaugurated to reduce arguments such as the ban on swapping stickers. Many pupils in the class thought that there were too many rules/regulations at the school, and two boys said that they felt that the school was more like a prison:

- Vinny:* School is all trapped up with the gates, the bollards, the security cameras
- CT:* [ ... ] He [*Vinny*] went up to my sister and said it was a jail house

However, the vast majority of the pupils consented to the rules and regulations; they were generally content to acquiesce in the interests of getting on with their daily routines, doing well in their work, and not wishing to displease Mr Hughes. Of course, though, the power of the school authority is always limited, and if a pupil set out deliberately to flout the rules there is only so much a school can do. As Denis, from 6H, told me when we were talking about fighting, 'it doesn't really matter about the rules...how can school stop them, they can only, like, keep them in, but they can always do it again after school'. Pupils (from any class) who were kept in at breaktime/lunchtime had to report to Mr Hughes's classroom or the corridor outside Mrs Flowers's office, and thus, in some ways, while docile bodies remained invisible, bodies that did not conform to the norm were made visible by being placed out of 'normal' space and time (Simpson, 2000). For many pupils though, the rules/regulations only became conspicuous when they were tested or challenged: many rules were deemed to be pretty much unbreakable, and most were accepted almost without question. However, some pupils viewed a minority of the rules as being either unfair, trivial and/or lacking in any adequate rationale, and, for instance, many Year 6 pupils ignored the dining hall rule and the jumpers-around-the-waist directive. The most common and visible form of resistance was the wearing of trainers and I will explore this issue in greater detail in the next chapter.

At Highwoods, there were fewer rules but there were generally only minor transgressions. This was partly due to their strict and consistent enforcement and keen systems of surveillance, but the main reason was that there was a closer match of interests



between the formal and informal cultures; the parents had paid for their children to be there to succeed academically and this meant that they were expected to behave (comply). At Westmoor Abbey, there was a more flexible and relaxed approach to discipline and control, and the rules here were challenged with greater frequency and regularity as we will see with the issue of school uniform in the next chapter.

### *7.5 Teacher-pupil relations*

Schools, and specifically teachers, can influence gender construction in a number of ways: for instance, by treating boys and girls differently according to gendered expectations of what is appropriate (see, for example, Walkerdine, 1989; Alloway, 1995). However, Gordon et al. (2000a) argue that one aim of the school is to produce an 'abstract' pupil who is abstracted from differences in social class, gender, race, ethnicity and so on, and although teachers (some more than others) recognise differences between pupils of gender, social and ethnic background, in the constructions of the 'abstract' pupil they are often more preoccupied with differences in academic ability, personality, behaviour, age and appearance. Although teachers group and refer to pupils as 'boys' and 'girls' they see this categorisation as self-evident and so unproblematised (Gordon et al., 2000a). While age is the most institutionalised method of grouping in schools, there were also times when teachers deliberately used gender as a marker of differentiation such as when Mr Hughes and Miss Morris got the pupils to line up alternately boy/girl, girl/boy as they left the classroom.

Having control of a bounded physical space is an important part of a teacher's identity, and one of the key components of classroom management systems is the arrangement of

tables and desks. This is also of great importance to the pupils for it determines whom they are able to interact with on a regular basis in class. At Highwoods, the pupils had a choice of whom they wanted to sit next to in about half of the lessons, while at Petersfield Mr Hughes put boys and girls on the same grouped table (although not directly next to each other), and at Westmoor Abbey Miss Morris sat boys next to girls in a deliberate attempt to improve the boys' discipline and engagement with learning. Skelton (2001) points out that several writers working in English schools, who have been involved in strategies to tackle boys' underachievement, have noted that when it comes to setting nearly all the girls tend to be in the top groups and nearly all the boys in the bottom (Frater, 1998; Noble, 1998; Penny, 1998). This was not the case in the English and maths settings in my two LEA schools where the numbers were quite proportional (see Appendix 9). However, the tables in Mr Hughes's class were grouped into six academic abilities, and although this was not formalised by any name, the pupils were aware of the differentiation, and as Richard told me: 'Yeah...no-one's told us what the table groups are but it's just obvious.' At Westmoor Abbey, Miss Morris did not organise the class into ability groups except in the Literacy Hour when she had five tables, but there were no significant gender variations.

The teacher's role is generally understood to contain two principal related functions of teaching and discipline (Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1990; Connolly, 1998). The power of teachers consists of their ability to act: they are accorded authority and invested with rights to discipline [9]. During my fieldwork I saw little evidence of any teacher intimidation or aggression [10] except on the very few occasions when I saw Mr Hughes shout and then even I was startled. However, the teacher's position of power is also vulnerable for there is a construction and negotiation of order and the pupils are active

participants. Davies (1983) and Pollard (1985) also highlight the collaborative and negotiated nature of classroom order, and when pupils are unwilling to cooperate, the teacher is placed in a very difficult position. As Gavin said at Petersfield: ‘they can’t touch you, and they can’t keep you in for ever and ever and ever.’

When I asked the pupils what they thought made a ‘good’ teacher, the main themes that emerged were that they wanted someone who they felt knew their subject, could teach them a lot, could teach in an interesting way, was fair, had a sense of humour, and was firm without being over strict. Many of these points are summarised in the next extract which again includes Gavin from Petersfield:

- Gavin:* I like teachers that are strict but they have their funny points/  
*JS:* So they’ve got a good sense of humour  
*Gavin:* They have a laugh with you but when it comes down to work and, like, you don’t do it, you’ve crossed the line and they make you do it  
*Andre:* And he gives you more advice to do it, then you know the answer

### ***7.6 Reward systems***

An integral constituent of the policies of discipline and control at both Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey were a series of reward systems. As we saw in Section 5.3.5, Mrs Flowers’s anti-competitive policies forbade any such practices at Petersfield where the majority of children were generally well behaved (compliant) and worked perfectly satisfactorily without them. However, it is not my intention to argue the pros and cons of reward systems, but rather to report and analyse the pupils’ responses to them. In actual fact, the messages tend to be contradictory: although the majority of the pupils were

generally in favour, in truth they worked for some but not for others, and this is encapsulated at Highwoods by the following passage:

*JS:* Do commends work for you? Do they make you work?  
*Jason:* No, not me/  
*Arnold:* Yeah, I think I've got second most in the class  
*JS:* So you quite like them?  
*Arnold:* Yeah  
*Jason:* I've got two in my pocket and now they're, like, all mouldy, like a piece of paper  
*JS:* You're not that bothered about them?  
*Jason:* And when I touch them, they'll shrivel to bits  
*JS:* So you're not that bothered?  
*Jason :* No  
*Arnold:* The thing that makes most people bothered is that you get eggs/  
*Jason :* You get a chocolate bar/  
*Arnold:* Oh yeah, you do, yeah

Many boys repeated the story of the chocolate bar to me, and in the early part of my field work its reward to children who came from materially wealthy homes both amused and amazed me. However it was not only its symbolic value, but the fact that to win the commends prize meant that an individual's name was at the top of the commends list which was prominently displayed in the form room. I have already argued (see Section 5.2.5) that the impact of these competitive reward systems at Highwoods and Petersfield was often diminished by their over-use, and teacher inconsistencies in their application, but this extract also suggests that, for some pupils, they become an irrelevance once the pupils have passed the point where they can see no chance of winning the top prize, or even being high up in the rankings. Moreover, I would argue that some pupils feel that this point arrives before the first one is even given out.

The data were also inconsistent at Westmoor Abbey. In the first extract below the boys appear to be saying that they are (at least sometimes) motivated by the team point system, even though Chris (who actually contradicts himself), at the end, seems to be aware that they are actually being manipulated by the formal school practices which have locked into their competitive desires.

- Robert:* Sometimes I like working hard 'cos, like, you get team points and if you get the most team points at the end, then you get more sweets than everyone
- JS:* So do the team points make you try harder?
- Ryan:* Yeah
- Robert:* Yeah
- Chris:* Well it doesn't make you try harder 'cos like most people/
- Ryan:* You really want to win
- Chris:* 'Cos you really want to win so like you go like harder
- Ryan:* You try hard to get team points to win
- Chris:* I think that's why they put out team points, to make us work harder so then we get more

However, sometimes they could backfire as we saw when Tom was awarded the top prize of two sweets at the end of the autumn term (see Section 5.4.5). What is more, this could also happen when a pupil received a teacher's praise and acclaim.

- Tom:* Like you get embarrassed by your teacher saying like, 'He's really worked hard today'
- Eric:* Yeah I know, Miss did that when I did all the maths/
- JS:* And you don't like that?
- Eric:* No, I was upset
- JS:* That happened when you [*Tom*] won the team points didn't it?
- Eric:* He didn't want to win that, *I* didn't want to win that

- JS:* So you were a bit embarrassed; you'd have preferred not to have won, and she said, 'Oh Tommy you've come top' and did you get called a boff 'cos of that?
- Tom:* Hmm
- JS:* By who?
- Tom:* Dan

### *7.7 Relations with girls*

As I have already discussed in Section 2.5.1, difference from girls is a central component in the construction of masculinity, for although the experiences of gender for boys can be complicated, and changes between settings, masculinity is always constructed in relation to a dominant image of gender difference and ultimately defines itself as what femininity is not. Indeed, it can be argued that the boys' construction of girls as 'other' is a way of expelling femininity from within themselves (Mac an Ghail, 1994).

Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:112) remind us that

the most useful work on boys and gender studies the construction of gender from a relational perspective where the practice of various forms of masculinity is seen to be constantly constructed along with but in distinction from femininities

Although the primary focus in this study is the exploration of the relations *within* the boys' peer groups I am also concerned with the relations *between* the boys and the girls in the school setting. From the outset, I was keenly aware of the influence that girls have on the construction of masculine identities, and that is why it was so important to have three schools which were co-educational.

A number of researchers (see, for example, Thorne and Luria, 1986; Thorne, 1993; Francis, 1998) argue that children of this age are inclined to separate more and more by gender with the amount of separation peaking in early adolescence [11]. However, boys and girls are still part of the same school world, they share many of the same meanings and practices of the formal culture, and spend the majority of their time in close physical proximity. In contrast to writers such as Tannen (1990), Thorne (1993) argues against any notion of two separate cultures of boys and girls, maintaining that '*within-gender variation is greater than differences between boys and girls taken as groups*' (Thorne, 1993:104, original italics). Although boys and girls can appear, on first sight, to inhabit two distinct worlds there is also a great deal of overlap. In the three schools in this study each gender group had both different and similar interests, and also pursued a different but, at times, similar set of activities. The point is that these varied considerably between times, activities and contexts. Although the separation of boys and girls tends to be greater in schools than in local neighbourhoods (see Thorne, 1993; Jordan, 1995), Harris (1995) points out that children can afford to be choosy in schools whereas at home, or in the neighbourhood, children will often play with anyone they can get. Certainly the pupils at my three schools separated themselves by gender first and then, to a much lesser extent, by age. I found no instances of pupils differentiating themselves by race or ethnicity, but whereas categories of race/ethnicity, and also of religion or social class are more blurred and complex, gender is a highly conspicuous marker of identity and every pupil was, unmistakeably, either a male or female.

When given the choice, boys and girls generally showed a strong preference to keep to their own groups. However, the relations between the two sexes were different at each of the three schools, and I will consider Highwoods and Petersfield first before describing

the position at Westmoor Abbey where the greatest amount of gender association took place. At Highwoods, boys and girls existed in two separate and distinct worlds, and there was little interaction between them if they could possibly help it. Indeed, the daily contact between them was more akin to Schofield's (1982) observation that boys and girls often resemble 'familiar strangers' who have little knowledge of what each other are like. Of course, it must be remembered that Highwoods differed from the other two LEA schools for firstly, there were fewer girls (the ratio of girls to boys was approximately 1 to 3), and secondly, girls had only been admitted to the school in 1995, but how much of the gender segregation was due to cultural and/or historical factors is hard to say. Most of boys and girls at Highwoods had few positive feelings towards each other; they generally expressed a lack of interest and regarded each other neutrally. However, some of the boys from the dominant group categorised girls as oppositional, and there were a few instances where they seemed to regard girls as a form of contamination like Thorne's (1993) 'cooties'. In this first extract from Highwoods I am asking three boys what they think about the girls:

- Patrick:* Yuk [*in a loud, exaggerated tone, laughing; Josh joins in laughter, not sure about Calvin*]
- JS:* Ok, why's that?
- Patrick:* They're just annoying
- JS:* They seem very nice
- Patrick:* It's because we're at that age
- Josh:* One of the most annoying things they could possibly do is, when we're sitting on the bench in lunchtime, they come up and they kick you in the shins
- Patrick:* And they try and take your place in the queue
- Calvin:* It's fun, basically, to hate the girls and have wars with them
- JS:* Is it not cool to be seen with a girl?
- Josh:* No way
- JS:* You would get teased if you were with a girl?



*Josh:* Definitely!

*Calvin:* It would be the main thing if you were in Year 6

Taking into account the undoubted performative aspect in this interview, it is still interesting to note a few of the boys' comments in more detail. For instance, Patrick's assertion that 'it's because we're at that age' suggests that it is expected for boys not to like girls at this particular stage of their development, and later in the same interview Patrick goes on to tell me how he used to invite girls to his parties when he was seven. Calvin's claim that they (the girls) can 'kick you in the shins' and push in front of the boys in the dinner line suggests that is not always the boys who get their own way, while his observation that it is 'fun' to hate the girls again alludes to the performative and playful nature of the peer group culture. Finally, his perception in the last line that it is 'the main thing' to be used against you in his age group hints at the risks of associating too closely with girls. As in many other studies, some of the boys at Highwoods thought that it was highly precarious to play with the girls without the risk of being called gay, and this knowledge regulated, and possibly prevented, them from associating too closely. In other words, the 'other' was always present and acted to control boys' behaviours even when the real others were not there. Given the choice few boys or girls would ever sit next to each other and most tried hard to avoid it. And yet when I interviewed Scott, he openly admitted in front of two of his friends that he did not mind sitting next to a girl, which I would argue was probably due to his high status, and the fact that he had such an abundance of (heterosexual) masculinity that his sexuality was simply unquestioned [12].

Although boys construct their masculinity against femininity, it is my contention that these particular boys did not feel the need to secure their sense of 'maleness' by traducing all things feminine and female as the foundation of their masculinity was relatively stable

and secure. This is not to say that boys did not exercise power over girls, particularly physical power, and during the morning and lunchtime breaks the boys dominated the space on the tennis courts with their games of football. Girls were emphatically excluded and if they did try to join in the boys would deliberately kick the ball at them and drive them away. The boys categorised the girls along with the subordinated boys as 'incompetent' (without skill), physically weak and frivolous who were incapable of taking the games seriously. Despite school statements of equal opportunities, some of the girls told me that they had grown weary of asking teachers to let them join in, and the high perimeter fence which they sat behind watching the boys play acted as a potent symbol of exclusion [13].

However, as Calvin implied in the previous extract, there were also times when power relations were inverted and the girls were able to exercise power over the boys. Their power became particularly potent when the girls were able to publicly exploit, and tap into, either a boy's supposed hidden, unconscious, desires, and/or his insecurity and lack of confidence with girls in general, especially when it was in front of his peers and he was unable to find a strategy to deal with it. This is illustrated in the next interchange:

*Josh:* It's really funny because some of the girls have a certain power. Some of the girls have certain power to make another boy, if they don't like him, to be teased incredibly, like they say, 'Oh I love you, and then you get really badly teased/

*Scott:* Yeah, Josh, yeah, and then Josh went all red and then he started running away, 'Go away, go away,' [*in a funny, high-pitched voice*]...she goes, 'Oh Josh, oh Josh.'

[...]

*JS:* So does Claudia do it to wind people up and/

*Josh:* Yeah, and then they get teased by the other boys...she's like the leader of all the girls, it's really annoying because she's the leader

of all the girls...she's got this sort of load of power hanging around her, it's really annoying

At Petersfield there were far more cross-gender interactions: a group of eight girls (they were actually two groups of four) sometimes joined in with the large boys' group in the playground games, although these were sometimes on the boys' terms and, for instance, I did not see a single example of a girl playing football on the field during the summer term despite Petersfield's strict equal opportunity policies [14]. Thorne (1993) calls the interactions between boys and girls on the playground 'border work' [15] although she emphasises that this often highlights and reinforces gender differences just as much as it reduces them. Whilst I found that the boys at Petersfield generally constructed girls as different, they rarely categorised them as being oppositional, and the most common feeling was one of disinterest. Sometimes the boys complained that the girls received favourable and biased treatment from Mr Hughes, such as in homework assignments where, for example, girls were allowed to write about 'feminine' subjects like pop stars but boys were unable report on areas of 'masculine' interest such as PlayStation games or football teams. However, as I have mentioned, boys and girls were sat together by Mr Hughes at the same tables and none of the boys that I interviewed said that they minded this, and some even saw it as an advantage because there were less distractions from their work.

Like Highwoods, a boy would risk serious derogation and subordination if he associated with the girls either too much, or he played with them away from the main peer group. In one of the interviews, Fred told me of a conversation he had had with Jinesh which had arisen after some of the boys had been calling him 'Barbie' (after Barbie doll). This had

happened because he was perceived to be fraternising too closely with the girls and the following quotation shows Jinesh clearly defining the normative boundaries.

*Fred:* I mean, [*I said to him*], ‘It’s nice to be popular with girls, like with the boys’, and he [*Jinesh*] went, ‘No it isn’t, I like to play with the boys, and if you’re a boy you’re like a sissy if you play with the girls’

Like Highwoods, the girls were also capable of wielding power over the boys, and the extract below suggests that they have the ability to calculatingly pinpoint a boy’s self-consciousness when it comes to his embodied physicality, of how he looks and moves, which is so integral to his identity and sense of self [16].

*Jinesh:* They just hang around us and try and make fun of us [...], when we’re not playing football they just go in groups around us

*Mark:* They just walk around the playground and/

*Jinesh:* Talk/

*Mark:* Yeah

*JS:* They take the mick out of you, like what, what do they say?

*Jinesh:* Oh they just take the mick out of how we walk, talk and everything

*JS:* Do you take the mick back/

*Jinesh:* Yeah/

*Mark:* She [*he is talking about a girl called Candy*] just comes over to us when we haven’t done anything, like we’re playing cricket or something, she just comes over and starts teasing us/

*JS:* By saying what though, give me an example, I mean by saying that you’re a useless bowler?

*Jinesh:* [...] If we’re walking across [*the playground*] she’ll say we’re walking like a spastic, and how we look

*JS:* What if you’re hair is messy, if you’ve got a spot on your nose, that sort of thing?

*Jinesh:* Yeah.

The greatest amount of cross-gender interaction occurred at Westmoor Abbey. Boys and girls were sat next to each other in class by Miss Morris, but they also often played together as groups in playground games such as Runouts, and some girls even joined in with physical-strength games like Predator. Although boys and girls generally sat as separate groups during registrations and story times, I also saw them sitting next to each other during lunch, whereas eating together was usually an important emblem of gender group solidarity at the other two schools. The boys liked and respected some of the girls, especially if they were like them; in other words, if they were sporty (especially a fast runner), tough, funny, cheeky to the teachers, and if they wore fashionable makes of clothes and trainers. Unlike the other two schools some girls were ‘allowed’ to play football and three girls regularly joined in the Thursday game. However, these were the girls who were deemed to be suitably skilful and tough and the others had been expelled and banished. Some of the girls played in another game of football on an adjoining part of the playground with some other boys, although no boy from 6M dared to join in for fear of being ridiculed and subordinated. One of the girls who played in the main game was called Leanne, and was known and accepted as a ‘tomboy’.

*Ian:* The only reason Leanne is with us is ‘cos she’s tough, she grew up with me, and ‘cos she grew up with me and Sean she learnt the boys’ way, she’s like a geezer bird

*JS:* A what?

*Ian:* Geezer bird, she even admits it

Leanne was the only example of a girl in the study who was given a permanent license to cross-gendered borders. Reay (2001:162) writes that ‘implicit in the concept of “tomboy” is a devaluing of traditional notions of femininity’, but Leanne did not appear to have rejected the perceived limitations of being a female and actually spent the vast

majority of her time at school with other girls in her class. When I asked her if she thought that being a tomboy was a good thing to be she replied, almost dismissively, that, 'No, it's just normal'.

Liking and disliking girls was often a difficult and contradictory process, and despite greater gender mixing at Westmoor Abbey this was the place with the largest amount of misogynistic commentary. There was more sexual awareness and some girls were called 'slags' or 'tarts' if their skirts were thought to be too short, although these aspersions also came from some of the other girls. In her study of two Year 6 classes, Renold (1999) found that many boys who struggled to gain access to the dominant masculine forms compensated by defining their sense of 'maleness' through the vilification all things feminine but I found little evidence of this at Westmoor Abbey (or at the other two schools). Although the subordinated boys were the ones who found it difficult to relate and integrate with the girls, they were generally more likely to keep away from them rather than traduce them; indeed the majority of the misogynist remarks came from Dan and Jack and the other dominant boys. Although Fine (1987) writes that sexual interest can be regarded as a sign of maturity, few boys at Highwoods or Petersfield professed any interest in girls at all. Although there was far more sexual awareness and familiarity at Westmoor Abbey, and a greater number of boys and girls professed an interest in each other, there were only one or two 'serious' (although ephemeral) relationships, and I will discuss the issue of having a girlfriend as a means of enhancing status in the next chapter (see Section 8.8).

Unlike the other two schools, where attitudes and commitment to schooling were broadly similar between the two groups, the girls at Westmoor Abbey generally tended to be

more conscientious and attentive in lessons than the boys. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:140) maintain that many boys feel that the girls have a more committed approach to schooling and are not teased if they do well but this was not confirmed in my study. Whereas neither the boys and girls at Highwoods and Petersfield were teased for working hard and/or achieving high academic performance, girls at Westmoor Abbey were maligned and disparaged just as much as boys if they were perceived to be either working too hard, or attaining (academically) too well. Indeed, (just like the boys) they would be called a boff for a whole range of things that were perceived to be associated with conformity, and these could include not calling out; showing a willingness to answer too many of Miss Morris's questions; finishing their work on time; having too-neat handwriting; or wearing 'school' shoes or dress and so on. These insults were calculated to hurt and according to the girls they often did, thus having a significant effect on attitudes and working habits, and influencing many to play safe by aiming for the middle ground. In this next extract, note that Billie does not want her handwriting to be 'too' neat which, I am arguing, is due to her fear of being taunted.

- JS:* Is it a good thing to work hard?  
*Billie:* Erm, no  
*JS:* No?  
*Martha:* No  
 [ ... ]  
*JS:* Lucy, you have got really nice handwriting haven't you? Isn't that a good thing?  
*Billie:* It's good because then people can read your work, but it's not the best thing in the world  
*JS:* OK, so do you want to work hard or not?  
*Martha:* No, not really, we just want to be, like, in the middle, not really working hard and not really down  
*Billie:* Yeah  
*JS:* Why is that then? Why do you want to be just in the middle?

- Martha:* Because then you won't get teased as much as if you really worked hard
- Billie:* Yeah, 'cos if you really work hard people will just call you boffs sometimes and tease you more
- JS:* So does that affect you?
- Martha/Billie:* Yeah

There are two further points of interest. Firstly, whereas there were some girls at all of the schools who did not want to have anything to do with the boys, there were others who enjoyed mixing with the boys and found them good company, and as noted by Thorne (1993), it was easier for girls to transgress borders than vice versa. Secondly, most of the girls classified the boys' groups on the same basis and criteria that was used by the boys themselves; in other words, they were able to tell me that these particular boys were more 'modern' or more 'sporty' etc, and they also gave the same reasons as to why a particular boy was a leader or the most popular. I will return to this point in more detail when I look at pupil classifications in Chapter 9.

### **7.8 Conclusions**

This empirical chapter has explored the pupil relations between the formal and informal cultures within the institution of the school setting. Throughout this thesis I have been looking at how young 10-11 years *do boy* within the school setting; that is what it means to be a 'school boy'. However, this means something different from being 'a boy', and this is a fundamental tension that schools and the boys themselves have to try and resolve, for while schools attempt to encourage them to become passive, and compliant, and interested in education and learning, for many, being a boy revolves around identifying themselves as 'active', 'tough', 'forceful' and 'independent' and so on



(Skelton, 2001). However, the study has found that the vast majority of the boys were able to negotiate and manage a successful position between their two major sources of support, the teachers and their fellow peers. Indeed, a key finding is that, along with the girls, the boys were able to work hard and achieve high academic performance in Highwoods (particularly in 6J, but also to certain extent in 6B) and Petersfield without any peer reprimand. Most boys had no great attachment to school but saw it as a resource which could provide a concrete return for their investment of hard work, and so constructed a pragmatic compromise with the formal school regime. Although they found some of the work interesting, they generally worked for instrumental reasons and, in many ways, it was a kind of 'calculative involvement' (Etzioni, 1961:66) for the promise of examination success and future job/career opportunities. This was particularly true at Highwoods and Petersfield, and although there were also a number of similar boys at Westmoor Abbey, this was generally a harder place in which to support the school's aims and objectives, which was (at least partly) connected to the working class attitudes and dispositions towards schooling from (some of) the boys' parents. I have also argued that the boys needed to conform to their own peer culture as much as, if not more than, they conformed to the formal culture, and some boys (particularly in 6B at Highwoods and 6M at Westmoor Abbey) decided to play safe by opting for a position in the middle in terms of academic performance.

Although I have contended that all schools have relations of (attempted) control and (attempted) resistance I have argued that there was no substantive counter-culture in any of the three schools, for although there was more active intransigence and contestations (Aggleton and Whitty, 1985) at Westmoor Abbey, the boys did not totally, nor continually, reject the goals, values and authority of the school. However, throughout my

fieldwork, I did encounter disruptive behaviour in a number of classrooms, and I have made a connection between unruly behaviour and a boy's need to negotiate and gain an acceptable form of masculine identity in front of, and within, his own peer group. Although there was a high degree of association between social class and academic attainment and, for instance, no pupil who began the school year at Westmoor Abbey gained a level 5 [17], the relationship between misbehaviour and low academic performance was not always as direct and consistent. For instance, there were a number of notable exceptions such as Richard at Petersfield who was the highest academic achiever in the class but presented himself as a rebel, and who consistently undermined the school's principles. Most junior schools differ from secondary schools in terms of organisation and management (except the Year 6 Highwoods), but not so much in terms of curriculum and definitions of knowledge. Connell et al. (1982) refer to the officially designated 'core' subjects of English, mathematics and science as the 'hegemonic curriculum' which, they argue, invariably means that the rest of the subject areas become part of a 'subordinate curriculum'. This may have some basis: for instance, many boys at Highwoods certainly chose certain lessons to misbehave in, and many told me that were unable to see the relevance of Latin and found it 'pointless'. However, the boys also told me that they were unable to see the relevance and application of much of the work they were given and, in the final analysis, I would argue that the boys' misbehaviour had more to do with weak teaching; for instance, there was no visible deterioration in behaviour in Mr Hughes's class when he taught music or, say, religious education.

This chapter has also considered some of the rules and regulations and I have taken Petersfield as an example as this was the school where they were most stringently applied. Most rules were concerned with the regulation and control of the body

(including its appearance), and I have argued that much of the pupils' resistance to school inevitably had a physical dimension. However, although even the most conformist pupils were prepared to resist rules that they thought inappropriate, many saw the rules as being in their own interest, and the majority were accepted and only became conspicuous when they were transgressed. Few tried to break the rules at Highwoods, but testing the boundaries of the school's practices of discipline and control was more of a 'way of life' at Westmoor Abbey.

There was also a brief consideration of the boys' responses to the competitive reward systems employed at Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey, although findings were rather inconclusive. Whilst some pupils may have been inspired to work harder, some also felt that they had little chance of gaining anything from them and therefore paid little attention to them. Many rewards also lost their impact from over-use and conflicting teacher criteria, while some boys at Westmoor Abbey found them a negative incentive because of their association with the formal school regime.

The final section of this chapter considered the cross-gender relations in each school, and their effect on the construction and performance of the boys' masculine identities.

Whilst I found differences in the relations within each school, there was a general tendency for the boys and girls to stay together in their own groups. The greatest amount of integration occurred at Westmoor Abbey, and the least at Highwoods where there were almost two separate worlds. I have argued that, although the vast majority of the boys needed to mark out a set of distinctions from themselves and the girls, they categorised girls as different (*they* are not *us*) rather than oppositional, and the most common reaction (particularly at Highwoods and Petersfield) was one of detachment and disinterest.

Along with many other studies (see, for example, Adler and Adler, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Renold, 1999), I found that boundaries of masculinity needed to be continually defined and policed, and there was a considerable risk for a boy of being feminised (and so consequently subordinated) if he fraternised too closely with the girls. I also confirmed findings from other research that there was a tendency of boys to dominate space, especially in the playground, and also take up more of the teacher's time, particularly with Miss Morris at Westmoor Abbey, and in a few lessons at Highwoods. Although some girls sometimes played with the boys at Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey, girls were excluded from the games of football at Highwoods and Petersfield and only three were allowed to join it at Westmoor Abbey. They were also derogated at Westmoor Abbey (along with the boys) for working hard and showing a conscientious commitment to school. However, there were also many girls who refused to be dominated by boys: they stood up for themselves and, of course, some at this age were actually physically stronger. I have also provided data which showed a number of incidences where girls were able to deliberately exercise power over the boys, and when girls attacked their appearance it went to the heart of the boys' sense of masculine self. The boys at Westmoor Abbey liked some girls who were similar to themselves, although this was also the school which had the most misogynistic commentary. However, I have suggested that few boys actually set out to, or even felt they needed to, vilify all things female in order to secure their masculine identities, and they were able to draw on a number of other strategies in order to do this. Finally, although some of the boys at Westmoor Abbey told me that they 'fancied' some of the girls, there were only a very few boyfriend/girlfriend relationships in any of the three schools, but this is a theme that I will consider more extensively in the next chapter.

From these discussions above, I wish to argue that the boys had a different series of pressures, options and opportunities at each school to negotiate their relations with the formal culture, and this moves me forward to the next chapter which deals with the options and opportunities to gain status within the peer culture.

### Footnotes

[1] Throughout this thesis I use formal and official, and informal and unofficial on an interchangeable basis

[2] Of course pupils are both the subject of bodies of knowledge and also subject to those knowledges.

[3] Although I have argued that school has a profound influence on the academic and social experiences of each pupil, I have also alluded to the fundamental role played by the pupil's parents (see, in particular, Section 5.1.2). Family/parental ethos, and their aspirations and affiliations to schooling also, undoubtedly, affect a pupil's commitment to schooling, in either positive or negative ways. For instance, at least part of the pragmatic strategy of the Highwoods' boys came from their parents' calculated attempts to use the school as a means of securing their entry to university and the top end of the labour market. Moreover, although it is beyond the scope of the study to investigate saliency of ethnicity/race as factors in both pupil and parental school support (and I have no exact figures to support my assertions), the numbers and proportions of mainly middle-class Indian (as opposed to Pakistani and Bangladeshi) and Jewish children may well have

been significant with their cultural tendencies of studiousness and which, for instance, included the employment of home tutors at Petersfield. Certainly there was a significant minority of these pupils at Highwoods; the proportions at Petersfield were about one-third Indian and about one-seventh Jewish; while there were less than 1-2% of such pupils in the school population at Westmoor Abbey.

[4] For more about using red and yellow cards as part of the sanction system (based on the game of football) see Section 5.4.5

[5] Many of these researchers studied more conformist groups as well

[6] Of course the choice of conforming (not resisting) is also an act that involves agency.

[7] Level 5 was the highest score a pupil could attain at this school. Although some junior/primary schools enter a small number of pupils for Level 6, no pupils were entered at Petersfield.

[8] Pollard's 'gang groups' also had much less respect for their teachers. Connolly's 'bad boys' were generally involved in confrontations with other boys rather than against the formal school culture.

[9] Pupils can also act and are able to exercise control over others (usually not but exclusively other pupils) but they have no rights to discipline.

[10] However, I was not in the classroom everyday and I am not saying that this did *not* happen, just that I either did not see it, or I was unaware of it happening.

[11] In contrast, Adler and Adler (1998) found in their study that cross-gender contacts were beginning to reemerge by the age of 10-11, both for reasons of friendship and romance. They posit that cross-gender relations are characterised by three distinct stages, during which boys and girls are integrated, separated and reconnected. These roughly correspond (with some overlap) to pre-school to age 5 (Year 1); age 6 to 7 (Years 2-3); and age 8-11 (Years 4-6). Note that the genders were generally *not* reconnected at the three schools in this study, with the majority of boys showing little or no interest in bridging the gender divide.

[12] Once again I wish to remind readers of Thorne's (1993:123) analogy of 'money in the bank'. In her study she argued that a boy called John was able to integrate with the girls without derogation because of his 'unquestioned masculinity' which stemmed, amongst other things, from his sporting prowess. Thorne makes the analogy of John being able to 'spend' his masculinity like 'money in the bank', which means that he had plenty of it.

[13] Some of the girls really wanted to play football and five of them from 6B and 6K formed their own Saturday 5-a-side football team. This was actually acknowledged, and in a way 'honoured', by the deputy head during a Monday morning assembly.

[14] However, I only observed games of football on two occasions because the games were banned by Mrs Flowers for the last three weeks of my fieldwork.

[15] Thorne's concept of border work between boys and girls is a valuable and productive one. Nevertheless, it could be argued that it is inconsistent with her assertion that there is one cultural world shared by both groups.

[16] Although concern for appearance is supposedly meant to be more for the girls (Holland et al., 1998) I found plenty of evidence to suggest that many of the boys also took a keen interest in their appearance. This was the case in all three schools although it was most noticeable at Westmoor Abbey.

[17] Although Emlyn got 3 Level 5's in the SATs he came from another school outside the catchment area and only joined the class at the end of February.



## **Chapter 8      Using the available ‘storylines’: the options and opportunities of establishing status**

### ***8.1 Introduction***

This chapter argues that the notion of status (leading to position in the peer group) is a pressing requirement for the boys’ in their ongoing constructions of masculinities. It therefore sets out to explore the ways boys were able to gain and establish peer group status/prestige, and looks at the resources and strategies that they were able to utilise. As I have mentioned before, the resources that the boys draw on, and the strategies they employ, will differ in each setting because each has its different ‘set of storylines’ and ‘repertoires of action’ (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). The corollary of this is that there are a range of ways of achieving status in each school, and I argue that various options are either open, restricted or severely limited. The resources that the boys employed were many and varied but are all, ultimately, symbolic in the sense that their power derives from their effect, and from what they are interpreted to mean and stand for. The chapter finds that the single most esteemed and extensively used resource was physicality and athleticism as expressed by the body, a conceptual theme which runs across all three schools. It also considers other embodied resources and strategies such as acting tough/hard; using humour and wit (including cussing); the wearing of fashionable clothes/trainers; and the possession of culturally-valued knowledge (such as the latest

computer games). Finally, there is a discussion on the effects of having a girlfriend on status, although this form of relationship was found to be extremely rare.

## 8.2 *The importance of status*

One of the most powerful and urgent dimensions of school life that children have to deal with is popularity (Adler and Adler, 1998) which we have already seen as a recurring theme throughout the previous two chapters. At the three schools in this study pupils were keenly aware of who was categorised as popular and unpopular, and often made considerable efforts to enhance their own image and reputation. However, popularity is also associated with, and directly connected to, the children's notion of status (Corsaro, 1979), which can be defined as prestige or 'social honour' (Weber, 1946), and which comes from having a certain position within the hierarchy which becomes relevant when it is seen in relation to others. Weber (1963) has differentiated between *ascribed status*, which one is born with or given, and *achieved status* which one acquires through one's actions. For the pupils at school status was not given but had to be earned through negotiation and sustained through performance, sometimes on an almost daily basis.

The acquisition of status is interwoven with the development and construction of an individual's particular identity, and for boys it is inextricably linked to the active construction of their masculinity: thus the search to achieve status is also the search to achieve an acceptable masculinity, which is also part of constructing an acceptable identity. However, although status may be acquired individually, it can also come through, and be confirmed by, the sense of collective belonging to a particular friendship group.

Pupils live their lives at school within the particular historical, economic, political and cultural contexts of their society, and these structures and pressures influence an individual school's policies and organisations, and create a different set of priorities and needs. These diverse practices mean that there are a different set of possibilities for pupils to gain and establish status/prestige at each school; there will be a number of ways and means of *doing* boy, and these will have either a positive, neutral or negative effect on their perceived status within the school culture and peer group. For instance, while some schools (like Highwoods) will place a higher emphasis on sporting excellence than others, these same achievements that are affirmed and celebrated at one school will go unrecognised, or be marginalised, in others (like Petersfield); and while the wearing of fashionable clothes can bring high kudos and status in the pupil culture at some schools (like Westmoor Abbey), strict uniform policies can virtually close down this option in others (like Highwoods). So, we can see that these ways of performing masculinity are not simple independent choices which come from a range of independent options, for some opportunities are more open, accessible and easy to achieve than others, some are more limited or restricted, while others are practically closed and almost impossible to achieve. Some will be created by the formal school culture, others by the pupils themselves and they may either co-exist, or be in opposition to each other.

### ***8.3 Physicality/athleticism***

As we have seen, the major factor affecting a boy's position of peer group status and popularity was his athletic ability and physical prowess, and many aspects were exhibited and performed at school in various spaces at different times. Whilst some forms, such as

sporting prowess, may be validated by both the formal and informal cultures, others, such as fighting, may bring sanctions from the formal regime but kudos in the informal peer group, although, as I have written above, this will depend on the school where it happens. For instance, at Westmoor Abbey, although the victor of a fight may have been penalised or chastised by the adult authority, these boys usually gained more status than the defeated who would generally lose an appreciable amount of respect and credibility, and even friendship, amongst their peers.

Masculinity is instituted in the body and was expressed through physical practices. For much of the time the boys defined their masculinity through action, and their bodies/identities became signified either as 'skilful', 'fast', 'forceful' and so on, but also, of course, as 'awkward', 'slow' or 'weak'. A major conclusion from this study is that high performance in sport and games (both on the field and in the playground) was generally the single most effective way of gaining popularity and status in the male peer group. Sport was a major signifier of masculinity and provided a way of measuring a boy's masculine accomplishment against each other, and also against the wider world of men. In all three schools the best athletes were generally amongst the most popular in their class and year, and at Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey they were *the* most popular. The importance of sport in the formation of masculinities has been recognised by a number of writers [1]. Connell writes that 'sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture' (Connell 1995:54), and as Gilbert and Gilbert maintain, 'men's sport is the archetype of institutionalised masculinity' which provides boys and men with 'the quintessential manifestation of the masculine ethos' (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998: 60). Television programmes and magazine articles offer the boys images, models and fantasies of what being a 'proper' man is all about. Boys are strongly encouraged to

be active, physical, competitive, aggressive and so on; they are told that 'sport can make a man of you', and it is seen by many as an entry into the world of men. The bonding factor is also viewed by some as a key indicator of their masculinity (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996), and for the boys some games, such as football, give them the chance to form an inner collective group identity, and a bonded sense of male peer group solidarity.

Sport/games plays a leading role in the formation of masculinities in many schools and, typically, the top sporty boys have a higher status in the cultural life of the school. This was particularly true at Highwoods where sporting achievement was celebrated and honoured by the formal regime. However, despite playing a wide range of sports, it was football that was, by far, the most valorised game amongst the boys' own peer-groups, and it was the boys who were the most accomplished players who were the most popular and who held the highest status. Although it was also possible to gain a limited amount of status through work and academic achievement, football and sport took precedence.

- Calvin:* If you're not good at football you're not friends with anybody who's good at football, all the people who are good at football are the best people, like the most/  
*Josh:* Popular  
*Calvin:* Yeah, popular  
*JS:* [To Josh and Patrick] True?  
*Josh:* Very true!  
*Patrick:* Yeah  
*Josh:* We're sporty people  
*Calvin:* And the sporty people are much preferred than the people who are much more brainy

Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey both had school football teams (Highwoods had three in Year 6) that played competitive matches against other schools. At Highwoods,

informal games of football were played every breaktime on the courts during the first two terms, although it was only formally time-tabled during the spring term. Although conversations about football dominated the peer group discussions at Westmoor Abbey, school policies dictated that it was only allowed to be played once a week by the boys in Year 6, which meant that, in practice, it was only played in the playground for about an hour a week. At Petersfield all ball games in the playground using the feet were prohibited, and although football was allowed to be played on the school field everyday throughout the summer months (weather permitting), Mrs Flowers told me that the games were often banned due to the arguing, and during my last period of fieldwork football was stopped for the last three weeks of term after a fight between two Year 6 boys. Many writers (see below) have documented the role of football in the formation of dominant masculine identities, and by the time many boys have reached the age of 10 or 11 they will have spent thousands of hours, almost in rehearsal, practising to become men, of trying to look like and emulate their professional heroes (Swain, 2000). Examples of various adult imitations abounded, ranging from the language used, as in the football manager-speak of 'be first' and 'get stuck in', to the copying of goal celebrations. There was an almost ritualistic and fantasised quality to many of the games that I observed which, in many ways, were a series of set-piece, highly visible, stylised exhibitions. Although the games were generally fiercely competitive some swapping or reorganisation of players sometimes took place in an attempt to make the games more even and, therefore, more fun.

Although I wish to argue that football plays a central part in the production of (heterosexual) masculinities, and establishing oneself as a good footballer went a long way in helping to establish one as a 'real' boy, much has recently been written on this

subject and I do not have the space to elaborate further (see, for example, Renold 1997; Skelton 1997, 2000, 2001; Benjamin 1998, 2001; Connolly 1998; Epstein 1998c; Swain 2000). Besides, although the Thursday game of playground football was a major highlight of the school week for many of the boys at Westmoor Abbey, as I have reported above, it only lasted around an hour, while at Petersfield there was no football for the vast majority of the school year. At Petersfield, it soon became clear through the interviews that the whole topic of football had been effectively marginalised in the peer group culture, especially during the autumn and spring terms: although the majority of boys in 6H professed their dissatisfaction with the no-football rule, only 4 out of the 17 boys classified themselves as being 'very keen' on football, while two more declared that they were half-to-three quarters interested. Although some would talk about important televised games, the main topics of playground conversation seemed to be computers, the occasional TV 'soap', and various other outside school interests. Mrs Flowers felt football was associated with, and attracted, the 'wrong' forms of masculinity. However, its attempted elimination (for two terms of the year) did not mean that the more conventional and competitive macho types of embodied masculinity disappeared, but rather that they appeared in other forms; they compelled the boys to find and invent a range of alternative activities during their breaktimes, and these were based particularly on the physical resources of speed and strength, and this was also the case at Westmoor Abbey.

The number of different kinds of informal pupil games tended to be fewer at Highwoods due to the greater range of facilities, and the freedom and movement allowed by the school in terms of the use of space and facilities. Groups either played football on the courts (tennis in the summer), or went on the adventure playground, in the woods, hung

around in groups and talked, went to the library/computer room or attended one of the several lunchtime clubs. At the other two schools space in the physical layout was far more controlled: there were fewer amenities to use, and pupils were generally confined to the playground which became the central space of expression, and the stage for competitive embodied performance.

The ability to run fast was particularly valorised resource and all the boys that I interviewed could tell me who was the fastest boy was in the class. There were frequent tests of speed in the playground, sometimes involving a direct head-to-head confrontation, and as we saw in Section 6.4.3, Chris's victory over Dan in the cross-country trial (and the race itself) attracted a great deal of attention. At Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey, some of the playground games (such as the chase-game, Bulldog, at Petersfield, and Runouts at Westmoor Abbey) had been deliberately created around a competitive test of speed, for being a fast runner meant that you were more often a winner, and losers risked subordination and isolation. The following exchange comes from two boys at Petersfield:

- Jameil:* If you're a slow coach, you won't be able to catch with us... 'cos the main fastest kids are like, me, CT, Benjamin and [... ] Hussein
- JS:* They're the fastest, and is that quite important for the games you play... if you're a real slow coach you get caught?
- Jameil:* As we're the fastest we can get to the other side easily
- Matthew:* And then when we play with Rod, he always gets caught first, but we don't let him be 'it' [*in Bulldog*] because he's always going to be caught



Being fast also meant that a boy could excel in a greater range of sports, especially in football. The relationship between sport and popularity/status is also affirmed in these two extracts from interviews at Westmoor Abbey.

*Jimmy:* Like Runouts, is all about speed and dodging, and thinking about what you're going to do... and football's thinking about your passing, and you've got to have a good speed to get past defenders and good skill

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*JS:* How important is it to be good at sport?

*Chris:* Quite important because if you're good at sport, it means that you're a fast runner, you can get away quickly, you're good at games/

*Ryan:* If you're good at games, and you're a fast runner, you can get past people/

*Chris:* You get pretty popular if you're good at sport

Bodily strength was also another important resource and was a prerequisite in physical games that were deliberately designed by the boys to test toughness and stamina. As was the case with the fastest runners, the boys were also able to name the strongest boy in the class. As we saw in Section 6.4.3, one of the favourite games at Westmoor Abbey was called Predator and the object was to catch an opponent and then hold them down for a period of 10 seconds. Wrestling-type games also occurred at Petersfield, although here they needed to be a covert activity as they had also been banned by Mrs Flowers.

#### *8.4 Acting tough and 'hard'*

In all of these games that were devised to test speed, stamina and physical prowess it was important for a boy to refrain from showing weakness by admitting the feeling of pain and, particularly, by crying. In any game of physical contact, ability to withstand pain is frequently going to be put to the test, but for most boys crying is equated with being a 'wimp' or a 'sissy', and when I saw a boy tripped over on the concrete playground, or receive a stinging ball in the face during a game of football, he would almost inevitably attempt to affect an air of insouciant indifference, even though it must have really hurt. During my fieldwork I did not see a single incident of a boy crying and yet Julia and Katie at Petersfield told me that they had seen 'every boy in the class cry at some point' including CT, and, although the boys at Westmoor Abbey found it difficult to admit to crying themselves, a number told me that they had seen Dan shed tears when he was sent to Mr Lane, and told he was not going to be allowed to represent the school in the impending cross-country race.

The attribute of physicality also appeared in other forms apart from games and sport. For instance, there were some boys who deliberately cultivated aggressive, 'macho' forms of behaviour, which they saw as a way of establishing their masculine authority. Toughness seemed to characterise much of their attitude and relations towards other boys, though this was scarcely ever directed at girls. Most of the data in this section comes from Westmoor Abbey, as this was the school where acting tough and/or 'hard' (including fighting) was one of the main ways of procuring status, and a strategy very much open to any boy who had the physical resources to back it up. Even threatening behaviour, such as intentional pushing/shoving, was a limited option at the other two schools, especially

at Highwoods where a boy would be more likely to damage his reputation rather than enhance it if he had to resort to using physical coercion.

*JS:* People aren't admired for being tough are they?

*Josh:* No, they're not admired for being tough, if somebody picks someone up and throws somebody to the ground you're not popular

*JS:* They're not admired for being a/

*Josh:* A bully, no they're not... and everyone starts being afraid of them and that's not popular

Although still a limited option at Petersfield, CT had established his status in the group by acting tough (as we saw in Section 6.4.2). His authority was underwritten and backed up with displays of violence and intimidation, and although this did not bring him popularity, it earned him a certain amount of wary respect. Moreover, there were also a few other boys in the peer group who set out to invoke the strategy of fighting in an attempt to gain peer group acceptance and to prove their 'macho' credentials, although there was a strict moral code never to hit a girl. Connell's (1989, 1995, 1996) research into aggressive behaviour suggests that fighting is predominantly carried out by boys of poorer academic performance: however, while this may have applied to CT (and some of the boys at Westmoor Abbey), other boys such as Richard and Vinny at Petersfield were high academic achievers which suggests that there is no simple correlation. Vinny told me that he had been taught fighting skills by CT, and in this next extract he is boasting of his fighting prowess, and appears to believe that it is a way of gaining status and enhancing his position.

*Vinny:* I beat up these two boys, they came at me with three finger [*Vinny has a missing finger*], they went like that [*displayed a 'missing'*

*finger*] so I got them like that [*round the neck*] and started choking them

JS: What sort of age group were they?

Vinny: Year 6, and they were bigger than me, they were bigger than me

CT: Except for 'Tiny Tim'

Vinny: 'Tiny Tim' is small

JS: So you don't mess with Vinny?!

CT: I would

It is significant that Vinny believes that he gains more status by tackling boys who are from his own age group and who are bigger than him (which he repeats), and it is also interesting to notice CT's last comment which is designed to keep Vinny in his place, and to let him know who is the real boss.

However, the vast majority of the tough boys were to be found at Westmoor Abbey where, it could be argued, there was a relation to working class patterns of cultural behaviour (Canaan, 1991). Although Skelton (2001) reminds us that it is important to emphasise that violent forms of masculinity are not the 'preserve' of working class males, some of these boys undoubtedly imitated actions seen, and learnt, within their families and from other members in the local community. It was a necessary prerequisite of the informal culture for all the boys to appear tough, and one of the boys told me that 'you can't afford to be nice 'cos people will think that you're soft inside'. Acts of daring and displays of courage could also bring admiration and status, and some of these happened outside school. Inside school reputations of being tough were continuously being made and lost, and in the following conversation I am asking Dan and Luke from 6M about another boy in a parallel class:

JS: Isn't it true that last year Elvin was quite a tough kid?

- Dan/Luke:* No!
- Dan:* Everyone thought he was but now he's come to these fights and he's getting caned, and so everyone knows he's a weed; everyone used to think he was but not now
- Luke:* The only reason anyone likes me/
- JS:* But he used to win his fights?
- Dan:* No, he never used to have fights
- Luke:* The only reason that people started to like me is because I beat him
- JS:* Oh you beat Elvin did you?
- Luke:* Yeah yeah, in Year 3...because everyone didn't know me, and they was thinking I was a weed, but then I punched him and beat him, and then everyone felt proud of me

This exchange points to the essential insecurity of the dominant masculinity in this school because there is an almost daily need to sustain and defend it against challengers (Pattman et al., 1998) [2]. If a boy bases his status on toughness and fighting, he needs to be ever-attentive to potential rivals; he is only going to be as good as his last fight, and if beaten his status will rapidly diminish. It also shows how Luke uses the tactic of fighting to ingratiate himself with the peer group when he arrived from another school in the early part of his junior career, but it is also important to make the point that I am arguing that Luke's use of violence is connected to power and status, and is not the result of any inherent individual pathology in his masculine makeup (Moon, 1992).

Dan, who was most frequently nominated leader of the class, had built up his status on the foundations of athletic prowess and physical power, but his reputation had begun to decline after he had been soundly beaten in the cross-country trials, and then in the race itself held in February (see Section 6.4.3). Moreover, some boys had also noticed that Dan had not had many serious (as opposed to 'play' fights) for some time. All of them

knew that actions spoke louder than words, and that you had to do more than just claim you were 'hard'.

- Chris:* People say that they're, like, the hardest in the school, and he [Dan] reckons he was so hard, that's why people were scared of them, and if someone, [if] he was the weakest in the school, no-one would be scared of him, it's only 'cos they say that
- JS:* Right, you mean it's just his reputation for being hard, but has he sort of proved it with fights, fighting?
- Robert:* No...like the fights are like little wimpy fights, bashing each others shoulders
- Tom:* It's just names isn't it?
- JS:* They're not proper fights then?
- Chris:* Like he says, 'Don't push people, just punch them,' and so all right, he does it an all, all he just pushes them

Some of the previous fights (mainly from past school years) gained an almost legendary status amongst the peer group, and some of the descriptive language was graphically violent, and almost certainly exaggerated. The fights had an unmistakable, gladiatorial and performative nature, with crowds gathering round in a circle urging the boys on with sustained tribal chants of 'fight, fight, fight'. However, the majority of the boys tried to keep away from fighting. Although a boy could also show how tough he was by publicly defying adult authority, showing an insouciant 'couldn't-care-less' attitude, and/or by challenging the rules and receiving more disciplinary actions than others, many boys were negotiating their way between the two school cultures, and did not want to run the risk of getting a red card and being sent home by Mr Lane. However, sometimes their options became constricted, and few boys were prepared to chance peer ridicule by ducking out of a direct challenge: this was particularly true if it came from a boy in a younger age group.

*Tom:* You have to have a fight with someone, you can't walk away otherwise you'll be taken the micky out of

If a boy wanted to maintain his position of status in the peer group he had to learn to stand up and look after himself in the face of verbal threats and physical intimidation. In fact, not standing up for oneself was seen as a social sin and a matter of individual honour, and many boys told me that their parents had told them to 'sort things out for themselves' by hitting back, rather than by telling a teacher. At one point in the following conversation Chris asks me to confirm the practice of standing up for yourself and hitting back, a point which I studiously choose to ignore. Although using the help of an elder sibling or relative was not nearly as bad as telling a teacher, and may have been an effective short term tactic, a boy would usually pay the price for this in the long run.

*Robert:* Ryan needs to toughen up a bit

*JS:* Ryan does?

*Tom:* He lets himself get pushed around and then he don't fight back

*Robert:* He got pushed into a bush by a Year 5, right it was Sam, and he goes, 'Stop it' 'cos Sam was starting calling him names, and then we go, 'Just hit him,' and he goes, 'I will if he hits me or pushes me' and he started pushing him around and he didn't do nothing; he got pushed into a bush and he walked off and he was crying

*Chris:* Eric and all us said we wouldn't join in, just you two have the fight but he wouldn't, but if that was someone else, if someone pushes you or punches you, you'd just hit them back wouldn't you?

*JS:* So you've got to be quite a good fighter and look after yourself, stand up for yourself?

*Robert:* Some people like Simon go, 'Oh I'll get my sister's boyfriend on you and Tim O'Neil' [*an unknown person*] but he won't touch me 'cos my brother's older than him and my brother's left school and my brother/

*Chris:* That's what Dan used to do, Dan used to get his brother but when you get your brother, that shows that you're really not that strong, you have to get someone fighting [...] you can't fight for yourself

### *8.5 Humour, including narrative stories and the use of cussing.*

Humour was an integral and indispensable part of everyday school life, and its practice was a particularly prevalent part of the peer group culture at Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey. Although it took different forms in each school, humour played an important part in affirming and reaffirming the collective identities of the boys' and girls' peer groups and the relations between them: indeed, in many ways, humour was actually 'constitutive' of identities (Kehily and Nayak 1997:70). In the boys' groups it also tested out the boundaries of tolerance, and not only consolidated the bonds of the friendship, but was used as an organisational and regulatory device by positioning pupils and demarcating who was allowed to belong and who was not.

The resonance of children's laughter was a regular feature during my time spent at the three schools. Woods (1976) emphasises the therapeutic qualities of laughter, and describes it as an 'antidote to schooling', which is used by the boys as a form of coping with, and escaping from, the daily realities of the repeated routines, regulations and demands of authority. Sometimes humour was employed by pupils as a confrontational device against teachers, and it was possible to create a popular image in class by playing the 'class clown' which, in many cases, also meant being disruptive and mucking about. In the last chapter (Section 7.3.3) we saw that misbehaviour in the classroom (and around the school) could enhance popularity and status, and that challenging, and testing the boundaries of school's ( and in particular, the specific teacher's) authority by trying to



generate a laugh was a key constituent of the pupils' peer culture, and was used as a strategy to foster and confirm camaraderie (Francis, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). However, it also brought its own risks and it was also easy to fail in this very public arena where reputations could not only be made but also be broken. While this option was virtually closed in Mr Hughes's class at Petersfield, it was a limited option at Highwoods (depending on the teacher) and a more open possibility at Westmoor Abbey although even here it brought its own risks. Sometimes a teacher would 'triumph' and a boy could be humiliated with withering sarcasm, and it also depended on who you were as to whether you could get away with it amongst the peer group; a boy had to judge the 'right moment', and while some always seemed to have peer support (from both boys and girls), others attracted deprecation for trying too hard. However, humour was also used as a source for developing and reinforcing teacher-pupil relationships and many of the laughs were *with* teachers rather than *against* them. Besides, the pupils liked teachers who they felt were confident and relaxed enough to be able to have a laugh with them, and having a 'good sense of humour' was seen as a key ingredient in pupil evaluations of what made a 'good' teacher.

In all three schools the amount of specific joke telling was negligible, but although some groups told me that they never told jokes, they were still a device that could be used to affect a performance, and as Paddy told me at Highwoods, 'if you have jokes, that means you have got a bit of a bonus'. However, humour had much more to do with acting and *being* funny. Constructing themselves as being the 'witty comedian' went a long way to enhance a pupil's popularity and prestige, and some boys cultivated their reputations on their ability to induce a laugh (see Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Francis, 2000).

At Highwoods, humour did not appear to play a major part in framing, or controlling, the friendship groups although, as we saw in the last chapter (Section 7.3.3), some boys like Ben used it as an oppositional device to create a popular image by misbehaving. Nevertheless, boys could still gain status and popularity by being funny, and it was significant that the two most popular sporty boys, Patrick and Scott, were also considered by some to be two of the funniest as well. The boys often appreciated it when someone did something original, but sporting prowess took precedence.

- JS:* So are Scotty Morrison and Patrick funny characters?
- Paddy:* They are funny characters...me and Adam and George are quite funny
- Adam:* Yeah, but they're probably the funniest
- JS:* Is it true that they're very popular and they tell good jokes or not?
- George:* No, but Scott Morrison just does stupid things like [*mimics actions, puts on a stupid voice*]
- Paddy:* Sometimes he gives you red cards [*in the playground football*] for no reason, he comes up if, you score against him and he comes up with a piece of paper, 'Red card!', right get off' [*laughs*]
- JS:* Oh so quite original things
- Paddy:* Yeah, it's quite original
- JS:* How important is it in your group to tell jokes?
- Paddy:* Not very/
- George:* Not very...just important to be able to play football

At Westmoor Abbey, humour was an everyday, pervasive ingredient of the peer group culture *amongst* and *between* the boys and the girls. The boys liked some of the girls because they were funny and made them laugh, and within the boys' groups humour was used to both enhance and discredit reputations, and to constitute and consolidate friendships.

- JS: Is it quite important to have a good laugh in your group?  
 Eric: Yeah...if it weren't a laugh, the group wouldn't be together

Skelton (2001) has pointed out that the role of humour (and the ability to generate a 'laff') is a prominent feature of studies into working class masculinities set in the secondary school, and has been linked to the more 'macho' forms (see, for example, Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Sewell, 1997). This was also the case here: again, it was much more important to be considered as *being* funny than to be a good joke teller, and being creative and original could bring high kudos. Luke was generally regarded as being the funniest boy in the class, and like many at Westmoor Abbey, he used humour to relieve boredom and to gain himself attention, but also on other occasions, as a means of trying to cover up and deflect attention away from the fact that he was experiencing frustration and having difficulties with his work. In my opinion, Luke could actually be quite inventive: for example he pretended to inflate his jacket and turn himself into a Michelin Man after he scored a goal in football, and he was also a good mimic of accents from popular television shows like *South Park*.

Freud asserts that humour can also be a guise for aggression and hostility, and sometimes, and particularly at Westmoor Abbey, humour was combined with homophobic insults. Although the boys told me that these insults were not meant to be taken seriously, and were used as part of having a laugh, I would argue that they were actually designed to hurt and to position certain boys at the bottom of the pupil hierarchy. Kehily and Nayak (1997) point out the regulatory effects of humour on boys' (and girls') identities, and the homophobic insults were also a strategy to police and regulate the sex/gender identities of their peers. The boys were making the point that their own sexualities were entirely 'straight' and 'unfeminine' in every way, and 'in a doubly defining moment the

homophobic performance consolidate[d] the heterosexual masculinity of Self and the homosexual femininity of Other' (Kehily and Nayak, 1997: 82). Hence it can also be argued that by subordinating alternative masculinities/sexualities, these performances also, by default, subordinated femininities which, therefore, included all girls. The interrelationship of homophobia and misogyny has been pointed out by Epstein (1997a) and I will return to develop and expand on the theme of homophobic abuse in the next chapter (see Section 9.10).

### *8.5.1 Cussing*

This next section concentrates on one particular type of humour called 'cussing' which was used, almost exclusively, at Petersfield. The term was virtually unheard of at the other two schools, but at Petersfield it was a ubiquitous phenomenon amongst the upper school boys and a major device of gaining status/prestige, and positioning others in the masculine peer group hierarchy. Cussing is a form of verbal abuse, and the term is actually a derivative of 'cursing' which dates back from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Ayto, 1991). It was used at the school as a generic term for a kind of face-to-face verbal interaction covering anything from friendly playing and teasing, to highly personalised attacks. Although there has been some research into cussing amongst adolescents from Hewitt (1986) and Back (1990, 1996), there has been little previous exploration into cussing *at school*; it is alluded to in Kehily's and Nayak's (1997) study on humour, and there is important work specifically into racist name-calling in schools from Kelly and Cohn (1988), but the main empirical exploration directly concerning school-cussing is Slater's (1993) PhD thesis, and this is again set in the secondary school. The cussing at Petersfield took many different forms: it could be of a short or protracted duration,

involve friendly teasing or hostile persecution, be a private affair between two individuals, or be a public exhibition involving whole groups. Essentially, it was a verbal face-to-face interaction of name-calling based on displays of wit, and can be viewed as a competitive, stylised, theatrical performance; it was accompanied by a variety of gestures and postures, which often included the vigorous shaking of the fingers to affect a clicking noise.

Cussing rarely took place in Mr Hughes's classroom, although I witnessed an occasion when a particular pupil from the subordinated group got admonished by Mr Hughes, and there was a whispered chant of 'cuss-cuss' from some of the boys out of range of Mr Hughes's hearing. However, it was a prevalent and pervasive part of playground life which could be observed every time I went out at breaktime. It generally consisted of a rapid exchange of insults between two pupils, which often followed a pre-prepared script. They were following a set routine of verbal jousting, and although the cusses were quite personal, often referring to the other person's lack (or deficit) of intelligence, the vast majority seemed to be effecting an entertaining performance as a way of passing the time, and not doing much more than having a laugh. Some saw it as fun, but teasing and name-calling are fine if you are strong and on the winning side. Cusses were supposed to be exemplars of wit which appeared to abrogate the need to be able to tell good jokes. Humour is obviously a highly subjective and value-laden phenomenon, but I have to say that I found most cusses pretty unfunny. However, I will give you two examples to allow readers to judge for themselves: 'You're so dumb, you tried to drown a goldfish'; and, 'You're so stupid, you got run down by a parked car.'

The ability to 'hold your own' in a slanging match was seen as an important way of gaining and maintaining status: cusses often lasted for about half-a-dozen exchanges before one party either got bored or ran out of cusses to say; in some senses they were rather like a tennis match with each 'player' taking turns to make a 'hit'. Although most cussing 'matches' lasted no more than a minute, and were often enjoyed by both the cusser and the cussee, some developed into nastier, protracted affairs over a period of days.

The conversation below is the first time I came across the term:

- JS:* Is it important to be able to tell good jokes?  
*Jinesh:* No/  
*Jameil:* No.... it's like...cussing  
*JS:* Cussing, what is cussing?  
*Jinesh :* [...] It's hard to explain/  
*Jameil:* It's something like, say someone calls you a name, you can say a name  
back to them that's worse/  
*JS:* Oh, OK and then they say a name back to you  
*Jinesh:* Yeah/  
*Jameil:* And then people are frightened, and they see who is the best cusser

Jameil's last comment is an indication that, although some boys used cussing to gain status/prestige within their peer group, there was also an accompanying pressure of peer evaluation. Jameil reckoned himself to be something of an expert, and it became apparent that some boys would be recruited as helpers to provide good cusses when cussing matches took place in full public view, rather like duelling attendants. The effect of these insults depended on the context and the size and type of the audience present.

As I have mentioned, although the majority usually started off as a joke, they could be some irritating, upsetting and demoralising, and sometimes they degenerated into serious arguments or even fights.

- Jameil:* Say we had a fight, and it's a bit like having a lawyer, so you can get someone else to cuss them down, and I'm the best cusser. [...] Say Gavin had a fight with Richard, Gavin would probably get someone like Bobby or Andre or someone, and Richard would probably get CT/
- JS:* What as cussers?
- Jameil:* Yeah, and say Gavin loses, he gets someone better than CT
- JS:* Who is better than CT?
- Jameil:* I'm the best cusser in the school
- JS:* So a cusser would say a worse word that he could say?
- Jinesh:* Yeah/
- Jameil:* Because I've got the dictionary
- JS:* So you look them up, do you? So you're well prepared?
- Jameil:* I've got the cussing dictionary
- JS:* Where did you get it from, there's a special book is there?
- Jameil:* Yeah, when I went to Blackpool

Jameil was physically slight and not very good at games, and his projected image as a cussing authority was probably his best strategy to use to establish himself in the peer group hierarchy. In fact, not every boy shared Jameil's inflated opinion of himself, and many thought that his cusses relied too heavily on swearing rather than on any genuine wit, and that he also said them 'just to gain attention'. Many cusses did, however, contain swear words for by the end of the junior school many boys are in the process of disengaging from their childhood past (Harris, 1998), and using language replete with swear words and sexualised imagery was considered, by some of the boys, to be a testimony to their forthcoming engagement with their adolescent future; moreover, they were a necessary ingredient that defined their cusses apart from lower juniors boys who

were deemed to be unready and uninitiated. People were certainly admired for cussing within the peer group: Vinny, Jinesh and Richard were thought of as being particularly good (witty) but the best cusser of all was said by many to be CT who could ‘cuss anyone down.’ In fact, some of the girls said they thought that cussing really took off when CT arrived in the school at the beginning of Year 5.

In their study into racism in the secondary school, Kelly and Cohn (1988) found that the single worst form of name calling concerned ‘the family’, or more accurately, ‘the mother’. This was the same at Peterfield, and although I did not come across a single example of racist cussing, most of the serious cusses had misogynist undertones and began with: ‘Your mum....’ which was a highly personalised attack on identity. Two girls told me that CT’s favourite expression was, ‘Your mum...’, and although it could still be a more straightforward type of direct insult such as: ‘Your mum’s belt is the size of the equator,’ many invariably, concerned sexual mores/appetites; for example: ‘Your mum has felt more knobs than the gasman.’ Kehily and Nayak (1997:73) argue that the reference to a boy’s mother exploits ‘the contradictory “private” emotions of maternal affection and the public disavowal of the “feminine”,’ where males are positioned as some kind of moral guardians of their mother’s (and girlfriends and sisters) sexual reputations.

Although some pupils were able to ‘laugh it off’, some of these cusses were calculatingly and gratuitously designed to hurt and provoke a reaction; they have a direct link to bullying (Olweus, 1993; Sharp and Smith, 1994; Swain, 1998), and it was these types which sometimes ended up in a fight. Cussing occurred between girls as well, but not with the same frequency or intensity. Girls and boys would also cuss each other, but the



major difference in girl-to-girl cussing was that girls did not refer to another girl's mother.

I do not know where cussing came from at Petersfield but it was a phenomenon created and passed on through successive generations by the informal peer group culture, and was an expression of counter-school resistance. Mrs Flowers described it as being 'nightmarish', and taking up a lot of her, and other teacher's, time. Mr Hughes told me that he had a theory that the TV programme *South Park* was the main influence and prime mover behind cussing but, although it might have injected a new impetus and provided a few more ideas, the pupils themselves said that it had been going for as long as they could remember. However, in my last visit, during the last four weeks of the summer term, the amount of cussing seemed to have declined and this was confirmed in the interviews: some of the boys said that they had 'just got tired, [of it] 'cos it was the same,' and others told me that it was 'not in fashion anymore'. Whether or not this was because more of the boys' time had been spent playing football during the summer term will have to remain a speculation but it is still, nevertheless, a plausible possibility.

#### ***8.5.2 Narrative stories***

In their ethnographic study set in a secondary school Kehily and Nayak (1997) found that collective storytelling was a major part of the pupil culture. This phenomenon was less common in my own research, although many pupils certainly told me a number of narrative tales which reoccurred over the research period. As with the use of humour in general, this practice was most extensive at Petersfield, and in the working class culture at Westmoor Abbey. Some of these tales obtained an almost mythical status and often

retained their potency for many months, or had even been carried over from previous school years. However, unlike Kehily and Nayak, as these stories were told by both boys *and* girls, I do not wish to make the claim that they were used for ‘consolidating versions of heterosexual masculinity’ (Kehily and Nayak, 1997: 76). I found that these tales were often more likely to be used as a strategy to position particular pupils, or as a medium for the expression of pupil culture against formal school authority. One of the most popular stories (in the sense that it was most frequently repeated) was at Petersfield and originated from the previous year when Mr Hughes had been hit on the head with a tennis ball. It hints at the delicate, and sometimes hazardous, balance which the boys are continuously negotiating between the two cultures; and it also shows the consequences that can ensue when the meanings of a situation are misinterpreted, and the retribution pupils can suffer when the school decides to exercise the full weight of its power and authority.

*Richard:* When you get told off, the teachers don’t even give you a chance. In Year 5, or something, Chris and Liam Reddin in 6L [*a parallel class*], they threw a ball at Mr Hughes when we had Miss Iqbal as our teacher, and Mr Hughes just presumed it was us; he turns around and laughs, he goes, ‘huh-huh,’ and then we started laughing back, thinking that he was having a joke, and he’s laughing and/

*Tom:* ‘How dare you’/

*Richard:* He jumps up and spits in our face and goes, ‘How dare you throw a ball at me,’ and there was about ten of us, and only two people threw the ball from 6L and all these people from 6H had to stay in at lunch, write apologies... we got a letter from Mrs Flowers home, and none of us never even done a thing; we tried to talk to Mr Hughes and he spat in our faces and goes, ‘How dare you,’ and we had to stay in

Others were also told at the expense of the teacher as at Westmoor Abbey when Miss Morris, (reputably) accidentally farted as she bent over to help a boy with his work during Literacy Hour and then blamed it on Dan. In fact, the stories at Westmoor Abbey tended to have more sexual, even scatological, connotations, and a particular favourite, with its lesbian associations, concerned two girls who were picked up by Miss Morris for gazing at each other during a lesson rather than concentrating on their work.

*Ryan:* Miss Morris says Tammy, 'Stop looking into  
Katherine's eyes,' and everyone goes/  
*Chris, Ryan, Eric:* 'Oooh'

As I have argued, other stories were told to position pupils and some gained a particularly enduring appeal. While some tales of past fights were invoked to enhance status, others were collectively employed to malign and disparage. One narrative concerned some nits that were seen in a girl's hair during an assembly that took place in Year 4. These were described in graphic and colourful detail by a number of pupils, and although I doubted whether so many pupils could have actually seen them, their presence was still being used as an excuse not to sit next to her in Year 6.

### ***8.6 Image/fashion***

Another resource that some pupils were able to use to achieve peer group prestige/status was the wearing of fashionable clothes and trainers displaying their signifying logos and brand names. Many of these opportunities depended upon the official approach and policies on school uniform in each school, and while this was one of the top ways of gaining recognition at Westmoor Abbey, this option was restricted at Petersfield and

almost totally closed at Highwoods. Some people might think that the formulation and implementation of school uniform policy is a fairly straightforward and uncomplicated matter, and that it should be perfectly possible to have strictly enforced uniform as long as the desire to impose it is there. However, as I have already pointed out, all schools are interconnected to wider, surrounding structures and cultures, and each have their own different needs and expectations which result in different policies and practices: for instance, parental attitudes and the penetration of popular commodified culture are particularly vital factors. In this next section I do not wish to engage in the debate whether or not schools *should* enforce school uniform or school colours, but am merely making the observation that many of them do so.

School uniform is one of the techniques that schools use to produce the disciplined and compliant body [3], and since the mid 1980s, there appears to have been an increase in both the implementation, and enforcement, of school uniform in both the secondary and the primary school sectors (Heron, *TES*, 20 April 1990; Lepkowska, *TES*, 24 October 1997) which needs to be explained in the context of devolution and the marketisation of schools (Meadmore and Symes, 1997) [4]. Indeed, uniform is seen as a ritualised symbol of order and discipline, community, tradition, and higher academic standards (Meadmore and Symes, 1996), and has come to be used as a tactic of impression management in the projection of school identity (Davis and Ellison, 1991). My personal (although not formally researched) observations indicate that many primary schools have chosen the option of school colours (usually *one*, in the form of polo/T-shirts and sweatshirts), as opposed to a formalised uniform.

Being an independent school, Highwoods was associated with the long, historical public-school tradition of wearing school uniform. The policy was rigorously and stringently applied, and pupils were consistently under surveillance and picked up on the most trivial transgression.

- JS: What about the rules about school uniform?  
 Nicholas: I don't like the school uniform  
 JS: Is there anyway around that, can you sort of wear your top button undone?  
 Nicholas: No/  
 Callum: No, if Mr Hudson [*the deputy head*] catches you  
 Nicholas: Like in assembly he looks at everybody, likes scanning everything/  
 JS: Does he? So he really scans you?  
 Callum: Yeah, if your tie was, like, hanging down a little bit, or you're button was undone, then he gives you a conduct sig.

In Section 5.2.5 I wrote about a boy being made to change out of the trainers he was wearing in class, and Mr Hudson told me that if any pupil turned up to school in trainers they would be sent home forthwith. The school had the parents' backing, and indeed, expectation, that they would do this. Although the pupils did not particularly like wearing school uniform it had come to be habitually accepted as a part of everyday school life and I was unaware of any pupil attempting to challenge it [5]. In fact all appearance was tightly regulated and, for example, a pupil's hair had to 'be moderate enough to avoid attracting undue attention' (*Highwoods Parent Handbook, 1998/99*). Occasionally, a pupil would try and test out the boundaries, and on the morning of the Common Entrance examination a number of Year 8 pupils turned up for school, in a pre-planned operation, with bleached streaks in their hair and the school had to decide whether or not to send them home immediately, or after they had taken the exam [6].

At Petersfield, although the wearing of school uniform was a little more relaxed it was also strictly controlled. In common with the majority of LEA schools Petersfield had taken the decision to wear 'colours' rather than a 'uniform' although it was still a uniform in everything but name. The parents had initiated the introduction of a uniform at an AGM [7] in the early 1990's, which Mrs Flowers reasoned gave her the mandate and authority for its rigid enforcement when she arrived at the school in 1994; she told me that she felt that 'if the parents have asked for a uniform, why [weren't] the children wearing it properly' [8]. As I have already mentioned, the pupils were required to wear white collars on shirts or polo-shirts *inside* a Petersfield sweatshirt, black/grey trousers or skirt, and black shoes, and training shoes (trainers) were generally prohibited. One of Mrs Flowers's own rules (see section 5.3.6) included a directive where the pupils were not allowed to tie their jumpers round their waists because Mrs Flowers thought that it looked aesthetically displeasing, or in her word, 'sloppy'.

The uniform rules were generally adhered to and only one boy, CT, in Mr Hughes's class did not wear an official Petersfield sweatshirt (replete with badge) although the one he did wear was still the same colour. Trousers and skirts were also extensively worn, and although I saw a few boys wearing black tracksuit bottoms, they were without any markings or brand names. The most noticeable sign of pupil resistance was the wearing of trainers, and the boys were quick to point out to me they were wearing them. The number of boys with trainers increased over the year: I observed only 4-5 boys wearing them in November, but this had grown to twelve in March and this remained the case in July. Seven of the boys wore trainers to school everyday, while five came in shoes, changed into trainers at breaktime, and then kept them on for the rest of the day which meant that they were able to escape detection in the Year 6 meetings that were held by Mr

Hughes early on Thursday mornings. However, the fact of the matter was that trainers were actually tolerated by the school in the summer term as Mrs Flowers and Mr Hughes (I did not ask the other teachers) had made a deliberate decision to relax their gaze and concentrate on other priorities. Mrs Flowers acknowledged that, 'We're fighting a losing battle with the trainers,' and when I pressed her further, she said she felt that it was unfair for some of the less well-off parents to have to buy two different types of shoes, particularly when some of the pupils were soon to be leaving for secondary school. She also confessed that, 'I turn a blind eye to that in summer,' when she thought that wearing trainers actually looked better with the shorts (grey or black) that were allowed to be worn, and which, again, fitted in with her own personal aesthetic tastes.

The school's rigorously enforced systems of surveillance severely restricted the wearing of any items of clothing that displayed brand-names and 'makes'. It was made very difficult to bring the outside contemporary mass culture inside the school gates: even a small Nike tick was not allowed on a sweat shirt in the classroom, but although CT was the only boy who I saw with a Nike hat, a few of the boys had symbols and logos on their PE bags and outdoor coats. Most of the boys did not seem bothered about wearing designer-makes: a small minority still tried to get around school regulations by incorporating symbolic emblems into their hair cuts; Jinesh told me that CT had an Adidas one and Jameil had a Nike one, although they were so subtle that they were hardly noticeable (which, of course, was the point).

This situation was diametrically different at Westmoor Abbey where a loose enforcement of school uniform created a space for pupils to use clothing as a means of gaining recognition and status, of generating common bonds, and of sharing interests and

intimacy within the peer-group cultures. In many ways, we are what we wear, and I wish to argue that clothing and footwear were used as an important constitutive component in the construction and performance of the boys' masculinity. Certain items and brand-names acquired a specific, symbolic value, acting as a powerful signifier of the pupils' worth as people, and pupils who attempted to dress and conform to the school rules and regulations ran a high risk of being stigmatised and subordinated.

There was no school uniform when Mr Lane arrived at the school in 1990, but by 1995 a proposition from the school governors that pupils should wear specified school colours had been accepted by a parental ballot and included in the school prospectus [10]. It soon became apparent that, in practice, Mr Lane and his staff did not pay very much attention to trousers, skirts or footwear, but concentrated on the colours of the pupil's tops. Any top that was plain blue, yellow, white, black or grey was deemed to be acceptable, but Westmoor Abbey not only differed from Petersfield (and the majority of LEA schools) by permitting the use of *five* specified colours, but by allowing the tops to display motifs and designer labels. Only football shirts were prohibited, but even here two or three boys in 6M still sometimes wore them.

I was curious to find out the reasons for the more relaxed approach taken at Westmoor Abbey in comparison with the other two schools, and when I asked Mr Lane why he was not stricter on the application of uniform he told me directly that 'the main reason is because we can't [...] and the parents know their rights'. It is important to note that the school had no legal entitlement to impose a school uniform [9], and so it was not so much of a question whether Mr Lane *should* enforce school uniform, but whether he *could* enforce it, for unlike the position in the other two schools, there was a distinct lack of



parental support, or in some cases, an outright opposition. Schools need parental consensus, and if some parents were not prepared to back him, he was going to find rigid implementation an uphill struggle. So it was largely for pragmatic reasons that he had decided to concentrate on 'colours' rather than on 'uniform': it was essentially a trade-off.

*Mr Lane:* I just felt that parents of the children here needed as wide a choice as possible in order to give them a chance to conform [...] I really wanted to be as flexible as possible

In fact, even the 'colours' rule had turned out to be 'an on-going battle', and it appeared to me that although Mr Lane could (in theory) have spent a large part of his day 'picking up' pupils on their uniform transgressions, he had deliberately chosen to focus his energies on priorities elsewhere, especially in other areas of school discipline. Despite Mr Lane's assertions that, 'on a good day, I like to think we get about 95% compliance,' (for top colours) my own observations suggested the figure was nearer to 80% for the school as a whole, and we both agreed that this deteriorated towards the top age range. However, assessments depend on the criteria used and how strictly they are applied. Within class 6M, the only boy who wore full school uniform (including grey trousers and black shoes) was Chris and this was due to his mother's insistence. However, despite the occasional aspersions from Dan, he was able to get away with this more easily than if some of the others had worn it due to the high status that he had established through his speed and general physicality/athleticism. Although, given such a wide choice of colours it was almost harder *not* to find an approved colour, only about 14-15 out the 25 pupils in 6M wore correct colours on a regular basis; the rest (about 10; 5 boys and 5 girls) wore various tops in various colours emblazoned with designer labels and motifs. Within the

context of clothing there was an inextricable link to sport with its associations of athleticism, strength, power and cultural status (Parker, 1996b); nearly all the pupils in 6M wore tracksuit bottoms (in varying colours), and only 3 girls usually wore skirts. One of the most controversial parts of school uniform often concerns the type of footwear, and whereas trainers were banned at Highwoods and restricted at Petersfield, they were *de rigueur* at Westmoor Abbey.

The wearing of non-school uniform (or parts of non-school uniform) is a major resource for pupils in the outward/public display of resistance to school regulation (Meadmore and Symes, 1996), and by the lack of rigid control and surveillance of school uniform at Westmoor Abbey a trajectory, which was denied or curtailed to the pupils at Highwoods and Petersfield, was opened up for the pupils to express themselves. Some pupils seemed to have decided on an almost contemptuous dismissal of school dress codes, with much clothing being highly individualised, and representing a direct challenge to school regulations. What made this situation so difficult for the school to confront was that the pupils' style of clothing was worn in collusion with their parents. Indeed, Miss Morris told me during interview that many of the parents wore the same style of clothes as their children. Of course, the vast majority of the pupils' clothes were bought by the parents; these children were generally too young to earn money to pay for these expensive items, and there was no evidence that they procured them by illegal means.

Teachers, too, have their own dress code which, as Epstein and Johnson (1998) point out, often tends to be 'safe', 'respectable' and generally neutral. However, although this may have been the case at the other two schools, about a third of the teachers at Westmoor Abbey (and a higher proportion of teaching assistants), had adopted a dress code which

was nearer to that of the children's, reflecting various signifiers of fashion such as designer-labelled shirts, sweatshirts, tracksuit bottoms, large items of jewellery, and training shoes.

Although, at this age, boys' appearance in general is fundamentally presented and performed for the benefit of their own male peer-culture, both boys and girls in 6M took keen note of what each other was wearing. Girls also ran the risk of taunts and insults for conforming too closely to school dress codes and regulations (from both boys and girls). In fact, the vast majority wore the same unofficial 'uniform' as the boys, that is, tracksuit bottoms and training shoes, although they did not appear to have the same compulsive need to wear designer makes/brands, and more of them wore the Westmoor Abbey sweatshirt.

In his empirical study of taste in French society, Bourdieu (1984) demonstrates that fashion (including clothing styles) has an important function in classifications, and taste in clothing was *one* way that the pupils used as a means of uniting, including, and differentiating themselves from others. For the pupils at Westmoor Abbey appearance was a central part of how they defined themselves, and clothing seemed to signify self worth. Moreover, styles of dress formed a part of how the pupils wished to be publicly represented, and the designer labels and names so prominently displayed were a vital visible component in that promotion. Perhaps the preoccupation with clothing was so highly valued because the boys and girls had fewer alternatives of demonstrating material status compared to pupils from a different social class, or having their value (as people) legitimised by other means, such as working hard and achieving academically.

During the third week of my fieldwork, I remember Luke and Dan proudly showing me their jackets in the cloakroom, outside their classroom, and Dan saying, 'This one's worth £100', and also the disappointment on Luke's face when I failed to recognise the make of Kappa which was emblazoned on the side of his jacket. The importance of displaying the labels, getting oneself noticed, and making sure one was part of the 'in' crowd is illustrated in the following conversation:

- JS:* Have you heard of Tommy Sports? I saw Leah wearing Tommy, that's meant to be quite good isn't it?
- Eric :* Yeah that's quite good, the watch is/
- Robert :* It's very quiet though
- JS:* What do you mean, 'very quiet?'
- Robert:* It don't stand out
- Eric* Not many people wear it
- JS:* So have you got to have something that stands out?
- Robert :* Yeah
- JS:* Yeah, I mean the more it stands out the more you get noticed?
- Robert :* I've got a luminous yellow T-shirt, this is a good make, Diadora
- JS:* Is it important to wear something that stands out and everyone goes, 'Oh look, you've got that on?'
- Robert:* No, they don't go, 'You've got that on,' but they won't take the mick out of you. If I wear this it's all right.

Robert's last comment draws our attention to the risks involved for anyone not conforming to the group norms, for the wearing of certain clothes was very much a cultural imperative. It was as if masculine competence was on trial or on show, and looking good and having the right stuff to wear needed commitment and dedication, knowledge, and importantly, peer-group recognition, validation and legitimation. I would also argue that, although the boys' appearance was equated with their

performance, and in many ways 'to look was to be' (Skeggs, 1997:116), there was also the need 'to look' in order to be safe.

Within peer-group relations, certain items acquired a specific, localised, symbolic value such as particular brand names, and these were ascribed a higher cultural value than others. There was a hierarchy of brand names in play, and some of the most popular included 'Tommy Sports', 'Kappa', 'Reeboks' and 'Adidas'. It was the training shoe that had the greatest currency in terms of status, with their signifiers of wealth, choice, freedom, equality, sportiness, casualness, anti-school, and of collective belonging. Maguire (1999) points out that the advertising associated with these training shoes carries a series of cultural messages, and they are intentionally marketed to promote the symbolic nature and status of the shoe. For the boys that I interviewed, it was their comfort and mobility, but most important of all it was 'the look' and 'the style':

- JS:* So why do so many people wear trainers rather than shoes?  
*Jimmy* Because it makes them look/  
*Chris :* They reckon it makes them look hard  
*JS:* Do you think so?  
*Jimmy :* And you can run better in trainers than shoes, and they're a bit more comfortable  
*JS:* Is it part of the look as well?  
*Chris:* Yeah  
*Tom :* Definitely

Chris's use of the word 'hard' here is rather ambivalent and can be taken to mean 'hard' as in 'violence', as in 'cool', as in 'affluent' or as in 'masculine', and may actually represent some or all of these things. As with the tracksuit tops (and also T-shirts, jackets etc), there was a hierarchy of brand names. Two of the lowest ranking were 'Ascot' and

‘Gola’, and during an interview with two pupils from another class, aesthetic style was highlighted again, but so was the associated high price, and having the ability to afford it. *Real* training shoes were bought in *real* sports shops with their higher associated symbolic value. We can also see Ollie’s recognition of the transient nature of fashion.

- JS: Why are Gola so bad then?  
 Leanne: ‘Cos they’re just a terrible make...there’s no fashion in [them] whatsoever  
 Ollie: That’s the sort of thing you’d buy off a market, Gola/  
 Leanne: Yeah, I know, they’re so out of fashion  
 Ollie: [...] You wouldn’t get a pair of Gola in ‘Compton’s Sports’  
 Leanne: They’re too terrible  
 JS: What are the best ones then?
- Leanne: Erm, Reeboks, they’ve got classic/  
 Ollie: Reebok, Adidas, Puma  
 JS: Is that just ‘cos of the name, or it is because they/  
 Ollie: The style  
 Leanne: Yeah  
 Ollie: The fashion. It’s just fashion at the moment ain’t they? It’s just like saying, ‘Why do women like make-up...they like to look beautiful’  
 JS: All part of the look?  
 Ollie: Yeah

Once again, it was ‘the look’, style, and expense of clothing that seemed to come before considerations of practicability and/or comfort. Another brand of training shoes that were near the bottom of the hierarchy were ‘Ascots’. Using Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of the function of taste, we can see Tammy, in the first part of the following interchange, using clothing as a means of self-classification, inclusion and differentiation.

- JS: Have you heard of Ascot trainers?

- Tammy:* Yeah, they're rubbish  
*JS:* Are they real rubbish ones?  
*Tammy:* They don't ruin easily, but they just *[inaudible]*  
*JS:* In what way are they rubbish then?  
*Tammy:* It's just, no-one hardly likes them  
*JS:* Why though?  
*Tammy:* Everyone who likes them, people like who don't come in designer gear come in them kind of trainers [ ... ] but me and Kevin and all that come in Reebok  
*JS:* Right...so...  
*Tammy:* Reebok do ruin easy though, and they're £45 a pair  
*JS:* Do they? So they're not the best trainers? Is that because you're not supposed to play football in them?  
*Tammy:* Erm, they're £45 a pair, they are.

Those who did not conform to the right 'look' at Westmoor Abbey were categorised as 'other', and this could lead to rejection and/or peer-group ostracism. It was the whole look, the whole package, that was required, and put simply, there was a cultural need to *conform* and *perform* to the masculine boundaries in play. This was policed by the boys from the dominant groups: if a 6M boy wore anything associated with the regulation school uniform, apart from the sweat shirt, they would often be called either 'boff' or 'gay', and they were used on an interchangeable basis. A boy could have a boff shirt, boff trousers or boff shoes, which usually meant that anything 'smart' was equated with conforming to the school's values and authority. 'Gay' basically connoted 'naff' or awful, and this even included his choice of shoe:

- Jimmy:* Some people say that Tom has got gay trainers because they're old  
*Tom:* These are old but I'm getting new ones

There is a more comprehensive discussion on the widespread use of the term 'gay' in the next chapter (Section 9.10).

### 8.7 Cultural knowledge

Although some boys, like Jinesh at Petersfield, were admired for their intellectual abilities, this did not bring them a significant amount of status within the peer group, but whereas it had a neutral effect on status at Petersfield and Highwoods, it often had an adverse effect at Westmoor Abbey. It was being able to talk knowledgeably about culturally celebrated topics such as football (the teams, the star players, the scores, specific matches, the rules and so on), being familiar with the latest computer games (such as PlayStation), and having knowledge of computer programming, that brought kudos and popularity within the peer group hierarchy [10].

- Scott:* The nice thing, good thing about Bradley is that he's brilliant at computers and he, like, knows every/  
*Josh:* He's not that good  
*Adam:* He is!  
*Scott:* He does, he knows everything  
*JS:* And is that a good thing or a bad thing?  
*Josh:* It depends whether if you're good at programming and stuff  
 [...]  
*Scott:* Bradley goes into on-line games and plays like/  
*Josh:* I play on-line games

The corollary of this was a deficiency of knowledge, either in the latest culturally-hot topics, or about, say the technical language of football could render a boy silent and be used as a marker of difference: for example, Sam at Westmoor Abbey was derogated because he did not understand the off-side rule in football, and neither he or his friend Simon knew the names or descriptions of some of the main characters in *South Park*. It was also important for a boy to be able to show a commitment to their adolescent future



by being ‘in the know’ regarding the meaning of certain swear words and matters of sexuality, although this did not appear as a main theme in any of the interviews I conducted.

- Robert:* Me and Luke, in Year 5, we used to ask Sam about bodily parts which were rude and that, and ask him if/  
*Ryan:* We’d ask Sam now about body parts  
*Robert:* Yeah, and ask if he knows [*much laughter, I can’t hear everything that is being said*]  
*Chris:* He used to say when your nose goes stiff  
*Ryan:* Like we asked him things like that  
*Robert:* We asked Sam what something was, I can’t remember what it was, and I think he said something like ‘your tongue’ or something

### ***8.8 Having a girlfriend***

There has recently been a growing number of studies considering the heterosexual positions of boyfriend and girlfriend, particularly at the upper end of the primary school (see, for example, Thorne and Luria, 1986; Thorne, 1993; Epstein, 1997b; Adler and Adler, 1998; Renold, 2000), although Connolly (1998) found that infant boys were also able to gain a significant level of status by having a girlfriend. Some researchers like Renold have found that ‘having a girlfriend’ was a common occurrence amongst the boys’ peer group culture [11] (they were also 10-11 year olds), and created an ‘acceptable and assumptive’ status (Renold, 2000:319) which emanated from the need to reinforce dominant versions of heterosexual masculinities. However, I found little evidence of these relationships in my three schools. Although some of the girls at Highwoods openly confided to me that they ‘fancied’ some of the boys, particularly Patrick and Scott, boys and girls at this school generally inhabited two distinct worlds and I found no evidence of

a single boyfriend/girlfriend relationship in any of the three Year 6 classes at this school. Although there was more inter-mixing at Petersfield I was only told about one such type of relationship in class 6H which was between Bobby and Katie, and even then I did not see them spending any time together at school. There was greater integration at Westmoor Abbey and some boys told me they would have liked to have had a girlfriend, but although there were a number of short term associations, they usually only lasted a number of days or even hours [12]. In fact the only two longer term heterosexual friendships (although these both only lasted a matter of weeks) were between Dan and Billie, and between Clara and a boy in a parallel class. Anyway, in the vast majority of cases, the boys wanted to do little more than to *possess* a girl, to use as a status symbol, and it was the ability to be able to *claim* the relationship that was the main objective.

Although it is possible that there were other boyfriend/girlfriend relationships that I did not know about, or failed to uncover, I felt that the pupils would have been only too happy to demonstrate their intimate knowledge of the 'gossip network', but discussions of who fancied who, and about any bona fide heterosexual relationships, were generally rare at Westmoor Abbey, and virtually absent at the other two schools. Despite the connotations of activity invoked by the phrase 'going out', it was ironic that the two or three couples that actually did exist did not actually seem to go anywhere, and 'going out' was a particular 'storyline' which signified, and gave the pupils access to, the positions of boyfriend/girlfriend from the social world of the adolescent or adult.

I could not discern any tangible status that Bobby gained by having a girlfriend at Petersfield, but at Westmoor Abbey Dan gained a certain amount of 'honour', and even distinction, from the boys when he theatrically dumped Billie during a lunchtime,

publicly (and arrogantly) proclaiming the reason being that she had refused to kiss him and that, therefore, she was obviously 'frigid'. The final extract in this chapter concerns Dan and Luke talking about the appeal of going out with older girls:

- JS: Who's the most sort after girl in Miss Morris's class?
- Dan: No-one, in our school they're all ugly
- JS: No, but there's Billie wasn't there, you were going out with her?
- Dan: No, but in this school they're all ugly, you should see the upper schools I go out with
- Luke: In Broadmead Manor [*the local secondary school*] they're well nice
- JS: But they're older aren't they?
- Luke: Yeah, but I like older people
- Dan: I've never ever been out with a younger girl
- JS: Never, so they've always got to be older or the same age?
- Dan: Yeah, but normally older
- JS: So what's the oldest you've been out with?
- Dan: The oldest?
- JS: Twelve, thirteen?
- Dan: Thirteen [...] I think the oldest is...I think the oldest is Samantha Brown [*she turns out to be in Year 8*] [...] I wish I didn't dump her now because I saw her yesterday and she/
- JS: Who?
- Dan: Samantha Brown, and I saw her in Broadmead yesterday and she looked well nice, she had all her hair down and all make-up on
- JS: Did she dump you, or did you dump her?
- Dan: No I dumped her
- JS: Are you sure Dan?
- Dan: I swear, Luke, didn't I dump Samantha Brown?
- Luke: Yeah

How much of this is mere fantasy and/or desire is unclear, and much of it should probably be regarded as part of Dan's ongoing negotiations and presentations to me as an adult researcher. However, it seems clear to Dan, at least, that he feels that status accrues

from associations with older girls (and boys), whilst, in this case, there is also a need for him to be able to maintain and reinforce his masculine power and control over women.

### *8.9 Conclusions*

This chapter has explored the localised level of the children's own culture, and has been concerned to show that there are different alternatives, or possibilities, of *doing boy* which are contingent to each school setting using the meanings and practices available. These will often be inter-connected to the formal/official school culture, which in turn, is affected by the school's own wider, surrounding structures. In other words, if we return to Marx's maxim; although the boys may have (some) agency to construct their own lives and identities, these do not take place in circumstances of their own choosing. The construction of an acceptable masculine identity is inextricably linked with the compelling need for a boy (and girl) to achieve status and position within the peer group. Within each school there are a number of different ways for a boy to gain status, and these will often be dependent on the array of resources and strategies that are available, and, able to be deployed. Some of these have different effects (or consequences) in each setting (which may be classified as positive, neutral or negative) so that, for instance, whereas acting tough and hard at Westmoor Abbey was generally valorised by the informal culture, this had a negative effect on a boy's status at Highwoods, and whereas working hard in class usually had a neutral effect on status at both Highwoods and Petersfield, it had a negative effect at Westmoor Abbey. This means that there are a number of different options and opportunities in each setting, and I have categorised these as being either open (possible), limited or restricted (difficult), or closed (virtually

impossible). Table 8.1. summarises the options available, and shows how the resources were distributed across the three schools:

	HIGHWOODS	PETERSFIELD	WESTMOOR ABBEY
Those options which were OPEN and available to use	(i) physicality/athleticism (ii) showing sporting prowess (on games field and in playground) (iii) having culturally-valued knowledge (iv) working hard (v) seeking academic achievement	(i) physicality/athleticism (ii) having culturally-valued knowledge (iii) working hard (v) seeking academic achievement	(i) physicality/athleticism (ii) showing sporting prowess (on games field and in playground) (iii) having culturally-valued knowledge (iv) wearing fashion clothes and trainers (v) exhibiting bad behaviour in class/around school (vi) being tough/hard
Those options which were more RESTRICTED	(i) being tough/hard (ii) exhibiting bad behaviour in class/around school	(i) showing sporting prowess (in the playground only) (ii) exhibiting bad behaviour around school (iii) wearing trainers (iv) being tough/hard	(i) working hard (ii) seeking academic achievement
Those options which were practically CLOSED	(i) wearing fashion clothes and trainers	(i) exhibiting bad behaviour in class (ii) wearing fashion clothes	

Table 8.1: The resources available affecting the various options and opportunities for gaining peer group status at each school

The analysis presented in this chapter strongly suggests that it was physicality of the body that was the principle material symbol of status, and which was involved in the production of Shilling's (1991a) 'physical capital' where active bodies were acted upon and given various meanings. Indeed, the other bodies around them provided the boys (and girls) with a differential reference point for their own bodily sense of self. Physicality was the most revered and prevalent resource which was found across all three schools, and boys were classified and divided by their physicality by both formal and informal school cultures. It was also articulated in slightly different ways within the contexts of each school: for instance, whereas the use of the body in a forceful and domineering way was frequently seen in the playground at Petersfield and, most notably, at Westmoor Abbey, this use of the body was generally confined to the games field at Highwoods [13]. Sporting success was a key signifier of successful masculinity, and even when the formal school at Petersfield regime tried to mute the salience of the body, and marginalise the place of sport by banning playground football, the boys created their own opportunities by inventing their own playground games based on speed, skill, fitness and strength. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) maintain that most boys realise that they are either good or incompetent at sport by the age of nine or ten and I would suggest that this actually happens a good deal earlier. I also wish to argue, therefore, that many of the opportunities to achieve peer group status (and also in later life) are largely conditioned and determined by the shape and physical attributes of the body.

Although there was a relationship between dominance and height it was the other embodied resources of force and strength that were more important in determining a leading position in the peer hierarchy, and, of course, having the will to use them. There

were other boys as tall as Scott and Patrick at Highwoods, and although CT was the tallest boy at Petersfield, the tallest boy at Westmoor Abbey was a boy called Micky (from a parallel class 6F) who had very little association with the dominant boys. Although using the resource of the body to act and to be tough and 'hard' was also found at Petersfield, it was generally more firmly established in the working class culture at Westmoor Abbey, and it was no coincidence that this was also a leading manifestation of masculinity in the adolescent and adult community on the surrounding estates. While there was a tendency for fighting to be predominantly conducted by boys of average to poor academic ability and achievement at Westmoor Abbey, it was also carried out by Richard (who had least one major fight, already alluded to in Section 7.3.3) and Vinny at Petersfield who were boys of high academic ability and above average achievement. There was also a strong link between the community and the wearing of fashionable clothes/trainers. Whilst this option to gain status was closed at Highwoods and restricted at Petersfield, the boys at Westmoor Abbey (and girls) used clothes to symbolise a way of life and a way of being, and it was the lack of parental support which was a major factor in the struggle Westmoor Abbey had to impose a type of school uniform. However, the pupils' consumption of signs was also due to the infiltration of popular culture, and it is here that we can see the powerful influence of commodified style in the formation of identities. Although popular culture is easily transportable, it was easier to get into some schools than others, and although Highwoods managed to keep it largely at bay, and Petersfield also partly succeeded, it was an influential feature on individual and collective identities at Westmoor Abbey.

There was also a connection between the working class culture and the role of humour which was such a conspicuous part of peer group life at Westmoor Abbey. Along with

Woods (1976; 1990) I have argued that humour was used to as a 'coping strategy' and an 'antidote' to schooling, and, also to organise, regulate and consolidate the peer group identities (Kehily and Nayak, 1997). It was also a major peer group feature at Petersfield, although here it found expression in the form of a distinctive verbal wit called cussing. The final section of this chapter considered other forms of gaining status/prestige such as the possession and articulation of culturally-valued knowledge which was venerated in all three schools; moreover, those who were unable to participate were rendered silent which could be used to signify difference. However, having a girlfriend was a practically absent feature from my research, and had very little effect on the performance and reinforcement of the boys' masculine identities.

Finally, if the foremost way of achieving status at all three schools was by using the bodily resource of physicality and athleticism, the most detrimental effect on achieving status came from behaving in (or being perceived as behaving in) an immature and babyish way which is part of the overall strategy of categorising someone as 'different' or 'other'. Subordination is one of the main themes in the next chapter which is the final chapter of the empirical section: it is set at the structural level, and discusses the way I have attempted to theorise and explain the forms/types of masculinity that I found at the three schools. It also includes an examination of some of the main techniques and strategies which were used by the hegemonic/dominant forms of masculinity to classify and subordinate others.



## Footnotes

[1] See, for example, Corrigan 1979; Kessler et al., 1985; Messner and Sabo 1990; Whitson 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell 1995, 1996, 2000; Hayward and Mac an Ghaill 1996; Parker 1996a, 1996b; Bromley, 1997; Fitzclarence and Hickey 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Martino 1999.

[2] Pattman et al. (1998) point out that being aggressive and competitive often produce greater levels of anxiety as there is more to prove and more to lose. Connell (1995) also makes the point that hegemonic masculinity is rarely achieved and never won.

[3] Epstein and Johnson (1998) point out that the compulsory wearing of school uniform is a practice which is almost unknown in the state sector in countries outside the United Kingdom and some of its ex-colonies.

[4] The 1986 Education Act (see, also, *The School Governor's Manual, 1999*) advises that responsibility for uniforms should rest with school governors rather than with Local Authorities.

[5] The uniform was also strictly enforced in games/sports lessons and activities.

[6] The school actually let the boys take the examination before sending them home.

[7] The parents' AGM stands for Annual General Meeting which is a statutory report of the school's progress held once a year with the headteacher, governing body and those parents who wish to attend.

[8] In fact, there appears to have been a good deal of apathy towards this issue and the voting turnout was actually very low.

[9] The Head's Legal guide (June, 1998:786) states that there is no established case in law to say whether a school can or cannot legally compel pupils to wear a specified school uniform. Moreover, "it is considered inadvisable for Heads to state emphatically that school uniform must be worn. It is better to phrase this aspect of the matter as *a strong request*" (my italics).

[10] Talking about Television programmes, such as the latest 'soaps' was, comparatively, rarely mentioned.

[11] In her empirical study Renold (2000: 319) found a total of nine out of 21 boys talking about ' "fancying", "asking girls out" and being "boyfriends" ' ( to girls).

[12] For safety, both boys and girls usually went through intermediaries when 'asking each other out'.

[13] Bourdieu (1978) also contends that the privileged classes view sport as a means of self-development and are less inclined to physically abuse their bodies than the 'dominated' (or 'working') classes.

## **Chapter 9          Classifications of masculinity**

### ***9.1 Introduction***

This chapter delineates the way I have classified the different forms of masculinity in this study. It begins with a consideration of using typologies which I found were unable to capture the full complexities of the boys' identities. I have understood the different forms of masculinity by looking at the relations between them, and this has provided me with a way of understanding the different dimensions of masculinity, and the patterning of its different practices in each school. I have drawn on the theories of Connell (1995, 1996, 2000) using his categories of hegemonic, complicit and subordinated masculinity. Although I found that the hegemonic, or exemplary, modes of masculinity took different forms in each school, they were still formed and based around physicality. I also found that I needed to create two new categories of masculinity, namely 'liminal' and 'personalised'. Liminal is an aspirant type of masculinity which is found on the periphery of the dominant form, and is embodied in boys who desire to be like the dominant group but who have a deficit of sufficient strategies and resources. Personalised masculinities, which were found mainly at Highwoods, comprised of boys who appeared neither to aspire to, or compete with, the idealised form, and were content to pursue their own forms of masculine identity. The next part of the chapter contains a lengthy section on subordinated forms of masculinity, and I have classified the main strategies used by the boys under the generic headings of 'difference' and 'deficit'. The final section includes a discussion on the wide incidence of homophobia: I contend that,

although masculinity is defined in terms of heterosexuality, homophobia is also used as a way of positioning other boys, and, following Parker (1996a), I argue it should be conceptualised in terms of *gender* as well as *sexuality*.

The multiple sets of meanings and practices at each school provided the boys with a series of diverse options and opportunities of masculinity to draw on in each context. In common with a number of writers I am writing about *masculinities* rather than *masculinity*, in order to illustrate the manner in which different individuals constructed their masculine identity in a number of disparate ways. These included the sporty-boy, tough-boy, hard-boy, witty-boy and so forth. However, I am not saying that any boys exclusively personified these types of boy, for they usually exhibited a mixture of these masculine versions at different times and in different places, and some boys were more successful at performing them than others.

## 9.2 Typologies

A common strategy in ethnographic studies of boys' school cultures is to identify typologies (or types of masculinity) of cultural groups, and a number of educational researchers have used typologies to demonstrate the way in which boys construct masculinities in very different ways within the same cultural site (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Kenway and Willis, 1998). Willis (1977), for example, counterposed the oppositional 'lads' and the academic, conformist 'ear'oles', and since then others such as Kessler et al. (1985) have identified the 'bloods' and the 'Cyrils'; Walker (1988) the 'footballers', the 'competitors', the 'Greeks', the 'three friends' and the 'handballers'; Connell (1989) the 'cool guys', 'swots' and 'wimps'; Mac an Ghaill (1994) the 'macho

lads', the 'academic achievers', the 'new enterprisers' and the 'real Englishmen'; Parker (1996a) the 'hard boys', 'conformists' and 'victims'; Sewell (1997) the 'conformists', 'innovators', 'retreatists' and 'rebels'; Warren (1997) the 'princes of the park' and the 'working-class kings'; Renold (1999) the 'tough-guys/footballers' and the 'geeks'; and Martino (1999) the 'cool boys', 'party animals', 'squids' and 'poofers'.

Some writers such as Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998) and Francis (2000) have questioned the use of these typologies maintaining that, although they may demonstrate (correctly) that boys are able to construct masculinity in very different ways, they also seem to reify gender as being too fixed, and they create discrete boxes which do not seem to allow much movement between them. Although this argument may have some validity, Mac an Ghail (1994:54) has recognised the 'real limitations in using typologies', stressing that he uses them as a heuristic device to show the range of masculinities at one school, emphasising that they 'are not fixed unitary categories'. Whatever the intentions, it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that there can be at least some movement between them and, as I have argued above, it is possible to be in more than one group at different times and in different places [1].

Although I am sympathetic to the use of typologies, and accept they have the advantage of showing the different forms of masculinity as outlined above, I have resisted using them in this study to describe and portray the characteristics of the pupil peer groups, and types of masculinities which I found in my own schools. Ultimately, I have found typologies to be too simplistic, limiting and restrictive, and unable adequately to illustrate the real life complexities of pupil identities which were often multiple, fluid and contradictory. I have to be honest and say that I was unable to make typologies work for

me: how I longed to be able to identify a number of distinct and straightforward categories exemplified by the friendship groupings such as a conformist (supportive) and counter (protest) culture, or an academic (mental) and non-academic (manual) culture, or, perhaps, a sporty (active) and academic (passive) culture. Some researchers, such as Martino (1999), have utilised the pupils' own descriptive categories to inform the typologies and structure their findings. However, the pupils in my schools were unable to suggest many names apart from the 'sporty' group (Highwoods), the 'sad' group (Petersfield), or the 'boff' group or the 'dimmy' group' (Westmoor Abbey) and I found these to be either inadequate, inappropriate or simply inaccurate.

In order to demonstrate some of the problems I encountered let us take an example from one class, 6J, at Highwoods (see Section 6.3.1). There were three main friendship groups of boys and then Timothy who was often on his own. During the early stages of my analysis I attempted to use typologies by applying descriptive names based on the pupils' relations with the formal school culture, their academic attainment, their behaviour, interests, and other diverse abilities, but this is where I ran into difficulties for as I have already written I was unable to find any unique distinguishing feature of *sui generis* that made a group stand out on its own. Being in the top academic set of the school meant that all the pupil groups were 'academics' and in many ways, and for much of the time, they were also all 'conformists' (or certainly 'pragmatists'), and yet we have seen that many of these boys could misbehave and disrupt certain lessons, particularly music and Latin. I tried to describe Group 1 as the 'sporty' group, but even though they probably displayed the most commitment and passion to sport, many of the boys in Group 2 were also sporty, played in the school A teams and showed prowess in other sports such as tennis and swimming. Group 3 were certainly less sporty but had a whole series of

disparate interests and no one discerning feature: they were not quite so active as the first two groups, although they enjoyed most of the sport and Felix was in the A team for rugby; they enjoyed talking about computers but not obsessively so, and anyway, many of the other boys in the class had similar interests. At one time I thought about basing the typologies on the spaces which the boys inhabited at breaktimes: Group 1 spent almost everyday on the courts playing football (in the autumn and spring terms), but then not all of the group played tennis on the courts when it came to the summer term. Group 3 rarely went on to the court and spent most of the time in other spaces such as the adventure playground, the woods, or the library and computer room, but then some of Group 2 also played on the courts and others did not. Moreover, the spatial metaphor was inappropriate to use in the other two schools where nearly all the boys tended to be restricted to the playground almost every day.

### *9.3 Further analysis leading to theorising relations of masculinities*

After finding I was unable to make pupil typologies work with any satisfaction I looked at different friendship groups again, and then started to disentangle these classifications and consider them from a different perspective. This was achieved by breaking up the friendship groupings and re-categorising and re-theorising the different masculinities in each setting on the basis of their relationship with each other. Although I am aware that such classifications are heuristic devices, and have the same limitations as the friendship groups they, nevertheless, demonstrate the range of masculinities that I found at each school, and allow me to see masculinity as a way in which the boys' interpersonal practices were organised, and examine the relations between them.

The majority of the categories of masculinity that I have listed below have been appropriated from the work of Connell (1995, 2000): that is *hegemonic*, *complicit* and *subordinated*. However, I have found some of his theorising on masculinity insufficient to describe the complexities in each setting, and as I said above, I found that I needed to propose other forms, namely *liminal* and *personalised* which I explore in more detail below. Although these relations of masculinity were based around the friendship networks, they did not always correspond exactly. The categories are not meant to be discrete for my intention is not to create new boxes and give the illusion that the boys listed below conformed to these fixed categories all of the time. Masculinity is not only diverse, it is also dynamic, and the possibility always exists for change: for instance, a boy from the dominant group could be challenged and lose his position of authority which happened to Dan at Westmoor Abbey. And Fred, who was stigmatised during the first part of my fieldwork at Petersfield, stood up for himself and (literally) fought back, and his athletic prowess gave him the opportunity of becoming accepted into the main group. These categories were also time-space specific, and a boy who was dominant in the playground at 11.10 could be placed in a subordinate position by a teacher at 11.15 (although he would still be dominant within his own peer group).

At Highwoods, I have identified four forms of masculinity (hegemonic, personalised, liminal and subordinated), and placed the boys from 6J and 6B under each heading (see Table 9.1).



Hegemonic	Personalised		Liminal	Subordinate
<i>Patrick*</i>	Jonathan	George	<i>Calvin</i>	Timothy
<i>Josh*</i>	Conway	<i>Bradley</i>	<i>Daman*</i>	Daniel
<i>Sanjay*</i>	Felix	<i>Malik</i>	Ahmed*	
<i>Bernard*</i>	Reece	Travis		
<i>Sherwin.*</i>	Sinclair	Nathan		
<i>Scott.*</i>	Harvey	Nicholas		
<i>Adam*</i>	Derek	Callum		
<i>Rex</i>	Murdoch			
	Paddy			

Table 9.1: Highwoods: forms of masculinity from classes 6J and 6B

KEY: names in *italics* shows that they played football on courts most days

\* shows they played in school football A team

At Petersfield I have identified three forms of masculinity (hegemonic, complicit and subordinated), and assigned the boys from 6H under each heading (see Table 9.2).

<b>Hegemonic</b>	<b>Complicit</b>	<b>Subordinated</b>
Jinesh	Jameil	Gavin
CT	Vinny	Denis
Richard	Hussein	Andre
	William	Bobby
	Mark	Fred (moves across to complicit group during the year)
	Tom	
	Benjamin	
	Matthew	
	Rod (occasionally subordinated)	

Table 9.2: Petersfield: forms of masculinity from class 6H

At Westmoor Abbey I have identified four forms of masculinity (hegemonic, complicit, liminal and subordinated), and allocated the boys from 6M under each heading (see Table 9.3).

Hegemonic	Complicit	Liminal	Subordinated
Dan*	Eric*	Robert	Simon
Luke*	Jimmy*	Ryan	Sam
Jack	Chris	Tom	Emlyn

Table 9.3: Westmoor Abbey: forms of masculinity from class 6M

Key: \* shows they played in school football team

#### ***9.4 The ideal pupil***

To help me understand and describe the features of the hegemonic masculinity in each school I asked the interview groups to make a list of attributes that an ‘ideal’ (or ‘idealised’) boy would exhibit. In other words, if a boy were to join the school and wanted to become the most popular boy in the class, what kind of boy would he have to be? (see Table 9.4).

	HIGHWOODS	PETERSFIELD	WESTMOOR ABBEY
Characteristics of the idealised boy	<u>Sporty boy (skilful,</u> <b>fast, strong);</b> captain of the A team in football or rugby; <b>well-</b> <b>developed</b> <b>interpersonal</b> <b>skills; friendly;</b> <b>looks after friends;</b> <u>competent at school</u> <u>work</u>	Athletic boy ( <b>skilful, fast,</b> <b>strong);</b> verbal dexterity (cussing); <b>well-developed</b> <b>interpersonal</b> <b>skills; friendly;</b> <b>looks after friends;</b> <u>competent at school</u> <u>work</u>	<u>Sporty boy (skilful,</u> <b>fast, strong);</b> good fighter/'hard'; cheeky to teachers; able to induce a laugh; wearing fashionable clothes/trainers; <b>well-developed</b> <b>inter-personal</b> <b>skills; friendly;</b> <b>looks after friends</b>

Table 9.4: The 'idealised' boy at each school amongst the pupil culture

KEY: **Phrases in bold** denote characteristics which can be found across all three schools

Phrases underlined denote characteristics which can be found in two schools

Phrases in plain text denote characteristics which are unique to one school

In all three schools the ideal boy was connected with activity. The idealised type of boy at Highwoods was the sporty boy, probably the captain of the football A team which was

the most prestigious sport amongst the boys. At Petersfield, it was less clear but was still connected to physical/athletic ability with the additional attribute of being a good cusser. At Westmoor Abbey, it was again the sporty boy although in this school you also had to be tough, visibly contest teacher authority, be able to generate a laugh, and wear the right kinds of clothes/trainers. They also needed to be able to 'get on with people', and it was noticeable that the leading boys in all three schools all possessed a set of well-developed social and interpersonal skills. As I have argued (see Section 8.7), whereas working hard and achieving academically had a neutral effect on a boy's status at Highwoods and Petersfield, it had a negative influence at Westmoor Abbey where a boy could not afford to be seen colluding too closely with the formal school regime. However, at all three schools an ideal boy would still need to show a certain amount of competence in class (although of course standards were relative to each class/school) and, for instance, not being able to read would usually lead to stigmatisation.

### ***9.5 Hegemonic masculinity***

As I have stated in Section 2.5.3, a number of writers have questioned the theoretical efficacy, and even appropriateness, of the term 'hegemonic masculinity', maintaining that it can actually restrict understandings. Although it is important to remember that the term 'hegemonic' has been recontextualised from macro class relations, and that localised and specific forms in school do not always necessarily bear a resemblance to hegemonic masculinity in the wider world, I believe that it is worth persisting with the concept. Connell (1995:76), maintains (quite rightly) that it is not always the most common type on show, and nor is it 'a fixed character type', but is historically and context specific. Although the dominant form of masculinity took a number of different forms at each

school in this study, there were also similar traits across all three sites which mobilised around a number of socio-cultural constructs: as we have seen, these included physical/athletic skill, strength, fitness, control, competitiveness, culturally-acclaimed knowledge, but also included the further attributes of discipline, courage, self-reliance, and adventurousness.

The term ‘hegemonic’ can be used to define the most ‘culturally exalted’, ‘idealised’ (Connell, 1990:83) form of masculinity at each school; it wields the single greatest power and authority, is able to regulate, influence and shape action, and, if you like, personifies the characteristics of the ‘real’ boy. Although it could be questioned as to whether we need to use the term ‘hegemonic’ to do this rather than, say ‘dominant’ or ‘leading’ (which are often used as interchangeable terms), I would argue that hegemony is a different concept from domination. In every school (as in any society) certain cultural forms tend to predominate over others, and certain ideas have greater influence on patterns of behaviour than others; although hegemonic masculinity can be underwritten by violence (of both implicit/subtle and explicit kinds), and there is generally some kind of resistance, the important point is that these forms do not operate by domination but by *consent*. Moreover, in many ways, the less the resistance, the more effective the hegemony.

### ***9.5.1 Highwoods***

As I have argued in Chapter 8, the leading form of masculinity at Highwoods was linked to the physical capital of the body, and was a kind of ‘muscular’ athleticism, and those who excelled at sport were those who were most popular, and who had the highest status

amongst their peers. Throughout this study, sport has been a dominant metaphor of masculinity and the top sporty boys held a major resource which was the physicality of the body: they had the speed, the strength, the skill and so on; but although they were ‘culturally exalted’ (Connell 1990) by some of their peers, many other boys had little time for them and did not mix in their company. I wish to argue that this masculinity was hegemonic at Highwoods in the sense that the sporting storylines and practices were an inescapable part of school life: the formal school-culture celebrated and honoured pupils’ sporting achievements in assembly stories, and the material evidence of a pupil’s success was there for all to see in the trophies and cups, and magazines. The top-sporty boys were not only exemplars of the formal-school sporting culture, they were also a highly visible, prevalent and pervasive part of the informal peer-group culture; it seemed to be the natural order of things, and although it was only practised by a small minority of boys in its idealised form, it was given an enduring stability by the official backing of the formal school-culture, which gave it social authority and made it culturally powerful.

#### *9.5.2 Petersfield*

At Petersfield there was less of a match between the formal and informal school cultures. As the boys were not able to draw upon an already made and established set of resources they had to improvise and create their own, and this made the ways of doing masculinity far less visible, more fluid and unstable. I have found the leading type of masculinity at this school the most difficult to classify as there did not appear to be any single, particular ‘idealised’ type of boy that was ‘the standard-bearer’ of what it meant to be a ‘real’ boy (Kenway and Fitclarence, 1997:119-120). The boys in the large dominant group held a wide and disparate range of interests and abilities, and the three most dominant boys, CT,

Jinesh and Richard, all drew on a very different set of resources: indeed, Richard was able to hold a high position of status despite being uninterested in football and lacking the attributes of skill and coordination. Nevertheless, there were still a limited number of acceptable ways of being a boy, and the hegemonic form of masculinity was still primarily based on and around an embodied form of physicality/athleticism, for it was these practices that tended to regulate and shape the majority of the meanings and actions. Although school practices (implemented by Mrs Flowers) tried to mute the salience of the physical body, the boys designed and created their own series of games around physicality/athleticism based on speed, skill, force, fitness and strength (see Section 8.3). There was also the art form of cussing which could bring a considerable amount of peer group status (and which was another form of embodied practice), and the other major resource used was contemporary cultural knowledge (for example, the latest computer games). Moreover, there were still the same powerful peer group pressures which boys had to conform to if they did not wish to risk derogation, and these subordinate forms were also policed and controlled by occasional outbursts of violence.

### *9.5.3 Westmoor Abbey*

Another form of hegemonic masculinity operated at Westmoor Abbey. This was able to regulate most of the thoughts and actions, to set the norm, and define what appearances and patterns of behaviour were 'right' and acceptable. I have described its characteristics before but only a few boys were able to exhibit this hegemonic type of masculinity in its undiluted form. Every boy in the class tried to embody and perform these features to varying degrees, and their success depended on the personal set of resources that they were able to draw on. The hegemonic masculinity effectively controlled and policed



other forms with aggression and violence. There were no other alternative masculinities in class 6M; other types were ruthlessly smothered and there was little resistance. The boys accepted this form as the 'natural order of things', they did not question its legitimacy, and it was therefore relatively stable and enduring.

Although this idealised form of masculinity was again based around the body it was very different from the hegemony at Highwoods, for rather than being sanctioned by the formal school culture it was constructed against it. It was also unlike Highwoods, as the landscape of the informal culture was created by the boys, who took many of their values and 'storylines' from the surrounding environment. Indeed, many of its practices were condoned by the local community and, although it had a highly visible presence, the official school practices were unable to stop, or effectively control it. The example of the boys' clothing, and the difficulties the school experienced in its attempts to regulate a type of school uniform demonstrate the difficulties (almost the impossibility) of policing the interface between the school and the local community.

### ***9.6 Personalised masculinities***

In every setting, there will also be other patterns of masculinity which will co-exist alongside the dominant form, and/or are actually produced at the same time (Connell, 2000). Just because there is a culturally-authoritative form of masculinity within each setting it does not automatically follow that all boys (or men) will attempt to engage with, aspire to, or challenge it: some, of course, are simply unable to do so. However, this also does not necessarily mean that these boys (or men) are inevitably subordinated, or that they have any desire to subordinate others. I have classified one form of masculinity

which I found at Highwoods as ‘personalised’, and although the term is not an ideal one I am unable to improve on it. I began with the term ‘alternative’ masculinities which characterised a different set of individualised forms of *doing* boy, but I felt that this had too many connotations with ‘alternative lifestyles’ and so I abandoned it [2].

### **9.6.1 Highwoods**

Although the idealised form of masculinity at Highwoods manifested itself in the top sporty boy, the majority of boys in the year got on with their lives without allowing the storylines of competitive sport to dominate them. Once again, though, the body played its part. These boys had no desperate urge to become captain of the football A team for the simple fact was that even if they wanted to, they had a deficit of the physical attributes and resources (in terms of body coordination, shape, strength, force, speed and so on) to succeed at the highest school level in the top-status sports of football and rugby. As I have already asserted (see Section 8.9), the majority of boys at this age have already come to realise whether they are proficient at sport or not. On the basis of the interviews and observations, it seemed to me that the majority of the boys in the year group had realised their physical limitations, and although many of them enjoyed the school sport/games, many had already negotiated and renegotiated a number of alternative ways of *doing* boy which I have termed ‘personalised’ masculinities. This large group was fairly amorphous and comprised of a series of small well-established friendship networks with boys who had similar interests; they were popular within their own peer-cliques, they were generally non-exclusive and egalitarian without any clearly defined leader. At breaktime, most kept away from the hard courts where the boys played their football and found alternative interests: some played other games such as ‘it’, some went on the

adventure playground, some played in the woods (except for the winter months), some went to the computer room or to one of the many lunchtime clubs that were available, some just liked to 'hang around' and talk. Although they may have been pathologised by a few of the top sporty-boys, and even, at least implicitly, by the formal school-culture, they posed no threat to the hegemonic regime and so were generally accepted and not picked on by any of their peers. In many ways, they co-existed alongside the hegemonic form; I found no evidence that they had any feelings of envy towards the sporty boys, and they appeared to have no desire to challenge them. In fact, their non-opposition can be seen an expression of consent to the hegemonic form, and as I have argued, the hegemony was so effective that it was the accepted situation. In many ways, these personalised groups seemed to have a high degree of social security and regarded themselves as different rather than inferior. They were certainly not complicit in any subordination, nor did they, in general, feel an imperative to subordinate anyone else.

These boys still understood that sport/games played a big part in the life of the school (how could they fail *not* to understand it?), and in fact, the physical attributes of these boys meant that many of them were able to play sport/games at a reasonable level of competency. Some of these boys even excelled at some sport/games: for instance, Derek won the Y6 tennis competition, and Murdoch was a highly successful swimmer, but these were not amongst the high-status sports. Certainly the majority enjoyed most of the sport/games. However, they appreciated that you had to be 'quite good' and put in a lot of effort, and were fully aware that a boy risked subordination/harassment (and therefore, implicit violence) if they were judged to be totally useless. However, for many of them, having a 'good personality' took precedent over sporting prowess, and by 'good' they meant kind and helpful, but also, lively and exciting, and sharing a common interest. If

top sporty boy equated with 'real' boy, these boys seemed to feel no less 'real' for not being able to demonstrate sporting excellence.

### *9.6.2 Westmoor Abbey*

There was also another group of boys whom I have also classified as exhibiting this type of personalised masculinity at Westmoor Abbey, but as they were in another parallel class, 6F, they did not come under the remit of this study. Despite this, I still feel that it is worth mentioning these boys to show that these forms may not be exclusive to one school. They were a friendship group of about 6 boys and I interviewed them, and spent time observing them in the playground, although not in the classroom. They seemed to be formed around a number of common interests: they were all academically orientated and told me that they worked hard for instrumental reasons because they wanted to get on. There was nothing clandestine or surreptitious about this, and although they were pathologised and subordinated by the dominant boys, there appeared to be sufficient numbers of them in the class to allow them to be confident and secure enough to accept the ridicule. They had no wish to be like the dominant boys, indeed they looked down on them and regarded them as 'wasters', but nor did they feel the need to derogate other groups. Every Thursday they chose to hold their own game of football adjacent to the main game, where they usually played against a team composed of a mixture of boys and girls.

### ***9.7 Liminal masculinities***

In any hierarchy of competitive sport there are going to be 'many more places for the unsuccessful than for the champions' (Messner 1992, cited in Connell 1992: 741) and this is also the case in the hierarchies of masculinities. At Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey there was a form of masculinity which I have classified as 'liminal': in other words, it was an aspirant form which lacked a sufficient number of resources to be accepted into the hegemonic form, and it found itself peripheral and confined to the margins. Indeed the boys that I have classified exhibiting this form could often be seen hanging around the edges of the dominant group watching the action: in the term used by Adler and Adler (1998) they were 'wannabes'.

#### ***9.7.1 Highwoods***

There were three of these boys within this classification from 6J and 6B at Highwoods (and others from the third class, 6K). Although they were also good at sport, and had any number of desirable sporting qualities such as perseverance, self-control, tactical awareness and so on, they did not have enough of the other requisite qualities to make them exceptional from the accepted norms. They were good, but not good enough. Although it was still possible to be friendly with the sporty boys, they found it almost impossible to be a close friend without actually being a top player. From their own accounts, they would have liked to have been included in the dominant group but, despite their attempted ingratiations, they found themselves tolerated instead of being really accepted, and were pushed towards the periphery.

### *9.7.2 Westmoor Abbey*

There were also three boys who manifested this form in 6M. In some ways I thought about classifying them as alternative/personalised masculinities along with the boys in the parallel class. Apart from Emlyn, (who only joined the class in March), they were also the most academically orientated and were in the top sets for English and maths, and Miss Morris's literacy group. As we saw in Chapter 7 (Section 7.3.1), although they were careful to negotiate a delicate balance between the formal and informal cultures, they worked harder than the other boys in the class, albeit for instrumental reasons. However, a kind of personalised masculinity was unable to take root in 6M: firstly, the hegemonic form was so powerful that any resistance was generally stifled, and secondly, unlike the boys in 6F, they generally looked up to the boys in the dominant group. They wished to be more like them but were deficient in too many of the resources. Although they joined in with most of the games and were not generally ridiculed by the hegemonic/complicit forms, they were sometimes reduced to the role of watching from the edges, and this was particularly evident during the games of football, or at one of the many pupil-organised competitive running games.

### *9.8 Complicit masculinities*

As we have seen above, the number of boys actually able to practise the hegemonic pattern in its purest form was actually quite small. However, there were a larger number of boys who joined in and were closely connected to the boys in the top group; they embodied many of the qualities and traits of the 'idealised' form without ever quite being one of 'the frontline troops' (Connell, 1995:79). Not all these boys wanted to be leaders but they were content to benefit from many of the advantages, or in Connell's (1995:79)

term, its 'patriarchal dividend'. This included being a part of the dominant hierarchy and meant that they joined in with the subordination of both femininity and others types of masculinity. This form of masculinity was found at Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey.

### ***9.8.1 Petersfield***

At Petersfield there were no alternative or personalised masculinities, and no coteries based around, for example, football, computers or cussing. I have classified nine of the large group of 13 boys as following a complicit form of masculinity: they emulated a variety of traits and patterns of behaviour of the three dominant boys, and they fully participated in the playground games and activities. They did not aspire to compete with, or challenge, the acknowledged leaders, but were content to go along with them, and this included the pursuit and subordination of femininities and other boys. They also enjoyed the protection and security of the group, and of CT in particular, when they were threatened by boys from other classes. However, although on first appearances, they seemed to be a close-knit and coherent unit, there were a number of underlying tensions and power struggles for, of course, there are also hierarchies *within* groups as well as *between* them: some were better at cussing than others, some were faster or stronger than others and so on. To my knowledge though, no-one was excluded from the main group, although Rod was occasionally teased/bullied by Vinny and CT.

### ***9.8.2 Westmoor Abbey***

There was also a complicit form of masculinity at Westmoor Abbey where three boys followed and imitated the characteristics of the hegemonic form, but without exerting its

power and influence. Whether this was because they lacked the desire or the personal resources is hard to say but, although they exhibited and performed the vast majority of the features of the hegemonic form, they were less prepared to use violence to enforce their style of masculinity unless directly contested. Moreover, although they often competed alongside the boys in the dominant group they had little interest to be a class leader or directly challenge any of them in a fight. They were full participants in the playground games and other practices, but they rarely made many of the decisions on which games to play or on who was allowed to be 'in' or 'out'. Moreover, they *followed* the trends (such as in styles of clothes and trainers, or new phrases of speech) rather than initiated them.

### ***9.9 Subordinated masculinities***

This final section looks at subordinate modes of masculinity which are positioned outside the legitimate forms of maleness as represented in the hegemonic form, and which are controlled, oppressed and subjugated. As all masculinities are constructed in contrast to being feminine those which are positioned at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy will be symbolically assimilated to femininity and tend to have much in common with feminine forms (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). As with the other forms of masculinity there were similarities and differences which were contingent to each school. However, although the boys still drew on a different series of resources in each site, the strategies of subordination across all three schools were all constructed under the two generic headings of 'difference' and/or 'deficit/deficiency'.



Said (1995) writes that each historical age and society requires the existence of another and competing alter ego, and so it is inevitable that they will create and recreate 'others' [3]. Within any given society (including the micro cultural milieu of the peer group), the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power which is embodied in the norm, and powerless which is embodied in the different. The powerful pressures to conformity that characterised the peer group cultures meant that a boy had only to look, and be, *slightly* different from the norm to be accorded inferior status. Under the rubric of 'difference', boys could be subordinated for associating too closely with the formal school regime (such as by working too hard, being too compliant or over-polite); by speaking too formally/correctly or being 'too posh'; by singing in the choir; or by looking different. Although I did not come across a single incident of any pupil being subordinated because of their ethnicity or race, aberrant physical appearances and differences in body language were keenly scrutinised and commented on. As I have written in Chapter 6, boys had to work hard at learning the appropriate peer group norms, and to be included they had to be what Thornton (1997) calls 'in the know': that is they needed to be able to talk about the right subjects, use the right speech (using the same style and vocabulary), wear the right clothes, play the right playground games, as well as move (sit, walk, run, catch, throw, kick, hit etc) in the 'right' way. Although I did not come across any pupil being teased because they were wearing glasses, Simon was bullied at Westmoor Abbey because he was deemed to have a 'funny shaped head'. However, the major material bodily difference came from the impression of being overweight, and my data is littered with disparaging references directed to boys and girls being 'a big fat blob', 'fat-boy', 'too fat', 'so fat', 'really fat' and so on. It was a serious handicap to boys' (or girls') attempts to establish peer group status, and boys needed to use other strategies and resources in order to compensate for it. In the extract below

(which comes from Highwoods) I am trying to find out if a group of boys have any ideas why Rex, who is academically bright, misbehaves in certain classes, and Travis's theory is that Rex deliberately attempts to avert the masculine gaze.

- Travis:* Rex is too fat and he wants to [*inaudible; much laughter*]  
*JS:* 'Cos of his weight? You mean 'cos he's fat? Why does that make him not work hard?  
*Travis:* If he doesn't make people think he's funny they might go on about his weight  
*JS:* Oh I see, so if he doesn't play the class clown people would tease him?  
*Travis:* Yeah

Under the heading of 'deficit', subordination could come through perceived exhibitions of immature and babyish behaviour (doing 'silly' things, playing infantile games, or associating too closely with younger children); displaying a deficit or deficiency of toughness (such as crying, showing fear, and/or acting 'soft'); being too passive and generally not active enough; and showing a deficit or lack of effort which was usually connected to a sporting context. Boys were also subordinated for the perception that they were deficient in certain culturally acclaimed traits, particularly connected with physicality/athleticism (such as skill, strength and speed etc); but also in specifically celebrated areas of cultural knowledge (such as about football, computer games/systems, TV programmes etc); and in areas of locally-defined class norms of academic achievement (which included pupils who were on the school's register for Special Educational Needs (SEN)).

The forms of discrimination worked at both the interpersonal and the group level. As I have already stated, the usual defamatory aspersions included 'goody-goody'

(Highwoods), ‘teacher’s pet’ (Highwoods and Petersfield) and ‘boff’ (Westmoor Abbey) which were used to equate with too-close a conformity with the formal school regime; while ‘wimp’, ‘sissy’, and particularly ‘girl’ and ‘gay’ were used across all three schools as the main terms of abuse to confirm masculinity as heterosexual, and, to position boys as different and attack their identity. (There is a fuller discussion of homophobia in Section 9.10.) Much of these insults were insidious and occurred out of teachers’ earshot: moreover, telling a teacher inevitably exacerbated the situation, and boys would find themselves subjected to further, and more intense, levels of abuse.

Some writers such as Jordan (1995:69-86) and Renold (1999) claim that it becomes even more important for subordinated boys to define themselves against the female, and that when they are threatened, and feel more insecure, they are more likely to engage in anti-feminine behaviour than boys who exhibit other masculine forms. However, as I have already mentioned (see Section 7.7), this was not confirmed amongst the subordinated boys in this study in any of the three schools. From my observations and interviews (including those with the girls), I was unaware of any boy in this category of masculinity traducing the girls. If anything, they tended to keep away from them as they were still keen to mark out their own spaces and define their identities as different from femininity.

### *9.9.1 Highwoods*

During the process of recording pupil classifications of friendship groups, and from my own observations, it soon emerged that there were only two boys at Highwoods who were isolated from the rest of their peer milieu, and who were regularly subordinated in the sense that they were actively, and almost continually derogated and pursued: Timothy

from 6J and Daniel from 6B. They were both bullied and experienced sustained homophobic harassment, being called, for example, ‘girl’, ‘gay’ and ‘wimp’, and Timothy was given the additional sobriquet of ‘goody-goody’ which was the Highwoods term for a hard-working, teacher’s pet. Although they did not comply in their subordination, they found it too powerful to effectively resist. As Highwoods operated a policy of selection, subordination by low academic attainment was not such a prominent feature within the peer-group culture as in the other two schools. As I have argued earlier in this chapter (see Section 9.5.1), what made the hegemonic agenda of competitive sport/games so powerful was the fact that it was backed and, indeed, created by the official school regime, and so the boys were able to use storylines that were already there. The following quotation, which was used about Timothy, could apply equally to either boy:

*Rex:* He can’t play football, he can’t run, he can’t play rugby, he can’t play cricket and...he can’t play anything/

Although it would be easy to assume that any boy who was unable to compete with the cultural hegemony of the sporty boy would be subordinated this was not necessarily always the case. Other Year 6 boys who were in the school C teams (and who were therefore both perceived and formally positioned as being less-talented/proficient) told me that they experienced little or no abuse, and further investigation revealed that their poor sporting abilities was only one of a number of reasons for Timothy’s and Daniel’s exclusion. The fundamental reason was that they were different from the norm and they were deficient in certain culturally valued qualities: not only were both boys no good at sport (and so had a deficit of sporting prowess), they did not enjoy rough games (and so had a deficit of strength, courage and toughness), and, importantly, gave the impression

of putting in little effort. Daniel was also accused of preferring to play with younger aged boys (presumably because he did not have any friends in Year 6), and he, supposedly, had an obsession with sticks and was referred to by some of the boys as 'The Woodsman'.

In this long extract below we are talking about why three boys thought Timothy spent so much of his time on his own. I have included such a long extract in its entirety as it provides an unedited, contextualised, example of the kind of conversations I had with the boys. There are lots of interruptions as the boys almost fall over each other in their enthusiasm to position Timothy as a kind of 'unmasculinised other' at the bottom of the hierarchy.

- Derek:* Well he's like, he acts sometimes like/  
*Calvin:* A girl/  
*Derek:* A girl/  
*Sinclair:* He doesn't like sport, he doesn't like computer games/  
*Calvin:* He *does* like computer/  
*Derek:* No, he plays all the crap ones, he plays all the crap ones/  
*Sinclair:* There's this helicopter game/  
*Derek:* No, there's this 2-D helicopter game, you have to shoot these things/  
*Sinclair:* And he sort of, like, works on how to use the computer and not just all games on the computer and doing other stuff/  
*Calvin:* This is his idea of breaktime: practise his music notes, either the computer room, or practising his instrument, he's like/  
*Derek:* He doesn't enjoy it either  
*Calvin:* He doesn't enjoy life, it's like he doesn't want to enjoy life, 'cos he doesn't mix with other people, he doesn't try to get friends [ ... ], he doesn't try to at all  
*Derek:* He just gives up/  
*Calvin:* He just gives up ...and he's like, he even admits/  
*Sinclair:* He doesn't like football, he doesn't like any sports apart from golf/

*Calvin:* He's different from everyone else  
*JS:* Yeah, but/  
*Derek:* He's just one person/  
*Calvin:* And he likes to be by himself very often  
*JS:* What do you mean, he's like a girl  
*Sinclair:* Well/  
*Calvin:* Well he does everything/  
*Derek:* Well he doesn't really act like a boy/  
*Calvin:* He's very prudish/  
*JS:* Let's hear from Sinclair  
*Sinclair:* He's always sort of like...when you call him a girl he's just/  
*Calvin:* Yeah/  
*Derek:* He agrees  
*JS:* Does he get called a girl?  
*Sinclair:* Yeah, he doesn't sort of go, 'Oh I'm not a girl,' he just goes, 'Ok'  
*Calvin:* Yeah, and sometimes he admits he's a girl  
*JS:* Does he?  
*Derek:* Yeah, and we.../  
*Sinclair:* Well I think he's just sort of like joking actually/  
*Derek:* Yeah probably...he was born in the [*inaudible*]  
*Calvin:* And he's very prudish and/  
*JS:* What do you mean, prudish?  
*Calvin:* When he's at swimming, he always goes in the corner, he doesn't like to be with anyone  
*Derek:* He's quite scared of stuff as well, like scared of the ball in rugby/  
*Sinclair:* Yeah I remember in football, there were two people running for the ball and Timmy sort of like backed away  
*Derek:* And when the ball is coming at him [*in rugby*] he just drops it and/  
*Sinclair:* Yeah he can't kick it you know [ .. ], it was painful to watch yesterday  
*Calvin:* He's like a boy yeah, he's like.../  
*Sinclair:* He's a boy but he, like, wants to be a girl  
*Calvin:* Well he doesn't want to be, I think like, he backs away from everything, and he's like...if someone has a go at us...if someone pushes us we'll push them back, this is a simple way of saying it: if someone pushes us, we'll push them back  
*JS:* You stick up for yourselves/  
*Calvin:* Yeah. Timmy, if someone pushed him, he goes and tells the

- teacher or/  
*Derek:* He gets scared/  
*Calvin:* He gets scared  
*Derek:* He cries a bit I think/  
*JS:* I've noticed that he's very polite as well, does that/  
*Derek:* He's too polite, it's like the formal thing we did in English/ [*in that morning's English lesson*]  
*JS:* He speaks in quite a formal register  
*Derek:* And we're informal  
*Sinclair:* He can't sort of say, 'Shut up,' to someone  
*Derek:* And he doesn't say any swear words or anything  
*Calvin:* We don't use swear words/  
*Sinclair:* Well not in school  
*Calvin:* No, we don't say them ever [*laughter from Derek*]  
*JS:* So he always speaks in the same way, whereas you'd speak to your mates totally differently  
*Derek:* Yeah, and he doesn't have different interests, he doesn't really like *South Park* does he? [*turning to the other two boys*]  
*Calvin:* He doesn't like anything we like/  
*Sinclair:* He doesn't like anything violent or rude

And so, again, all the reasons given above can be categorised under difference or deficit. Indeed, at one point Calvin actually says, 'He's different from everyone else'. Although the reasons include his poor sporting ability (he does not like games, he is no good at games, he is frightened of getting hurt in games), there are also a number of other factors which have caused Timothy's exclusion: he uses the computer in a different way, he does not enjoy life, he lacks perseverance and gives up too easily, he's prudish when getting changed, he does not stand up for himself, he cries in front of his peers (the antithesis of manliness), he is too polite, he does not swear, he speaks in rather an affected, posh register, he does not like the same cultural interests such as watching the TV programme *South Park* and so is unable to share in common topics of conversation. Time and time

again in the interviews, the boys would refer to Timothy's 'posh accent'; although, nearly all of the boys at Highwoods were very well spoken, they felt that Timothy's voice was rather unnatural and affected and this set him apart from themselves. Although some may argue that this may have been a class reaction, I would maintain that it is used as another factor which helped to construct him as 'other'. One of the main tactics the boys use is by feminising Timothy and they use the word 'girl' six times during the transcript. In other words, they are saying that he, and the femininity associated with him, is diametrically opposed to them: he (and it) are defined by what they are not. Epstein (1998a:103) writes that, 'the worst thing a boy can be called is a "girl", even worse than being called "gay boy", "poof" or "sissy" ', but although this was confirmed by a few boys at each school, the majority told me that it was actually swear words or (at Petersfield) a particularly bad cuss concerning their mother that really upset them.

### *9.9.2 Petersfield*

The dominant group at Petersfield also categorised and defined the other smaller group of boys by their 'differences' and their 'deficiencies'. They were regarded, and pathologised, as non modern and deficient in knowledge of up-to-date things (such as TV, computer programs, football news and results etc); as deficient in 'coolness' by not wearing the latest fashions and trends; as not being sufficiently loyal to friends by not sticking up for their mates; and deficient in athleticism or sportyness. They were also perceived to be deficient in a certain Year 6 sophistication by being more immature and 'babyish', and their counter school behaviour was deemed to be 'naughty' and 'silly'.

<i>JS:</i>	What marks out this group from the other group of boys?
<i>Richard:</i>	They do silly things/



- Matthew:* Yeah
- JS:* Silly things, such as?
- Richard:* Going to the toilet with some wet tissues and throwing them at the ceiling...erm/
- Matthew:* Going in the infants playground/
- Richard:* Yeah, they go into the infants, hide behind the trees, and then they run and bang on the windows in the infants
- JS:* [...] So they do silly things, what else?
- Robin:* They play silly games...like, they chase the girls all the way around/
- Richard:* And kiss them
- Matthew:* Yeah
- JS:* But you say, you chase the girls as well?
- Richard:* Yeah, but we don't try and get them, we just try and beat up each other, so if, like, Candy gets some of us, she punches us and that
- JS:* Right, so it's a different form of game with the girls
- Richard/Matthew:* Yeah

Although there was more resistance to the hegemonic agenda than at Highwoods (and at Westmoor Abbey) the subordinated type of masculinity found itself swamped by the sheer numbers of boys embracing the dominant form. The differences were also recognised by the girls who also categorised the boys into two main groups: they saw one (group) as 'trendy' and 'new' in terms of clothing/appearance, linguistic locutions, and socio-cultural knowledge, and therefore, the 'popular' ones; while the other (group) was the opposite of this and, hence, 'sad' and 'annoying'. The popular group had a certain style which was seen as a symbolic expression of masculinity, 'a collective evocation of an attitude embodied in their movements and appearance' (Radley, 1995:9).

- Julia:* They're the more popular ones...like everyone wants to hang around with that group
- Fiona:* And, I'm not meaning to be rude, but they're a bit sad

- JS: Right, OK...so sad in what way?
- Julia: Er, they go around annoying the girls
- Fiona: They spread rumours, and try and break the girls up
- Julia: [...] It's just that they're more...trendy
- JS: Modern, trendy? Trendy in what way then?
- Julia: Like, they wear the clothes, they talk like how everyone talks and everything like that
- Fiona: And 'cos Richard and CT are really, like, hip and cool, like everyone goes with them and everything/
- JS: Right, in what way are they hip and cool?
- Julia: All the new PlayStation games...the new computers, things like that
- JS: So they're up with the latest kind of trends?
- Julia: Yeah

The point is not so much whether these things were actually all true but that they were thought to be true, for their power and influence derived from their effect, and from what they were perceived to mean and stand for. The fact that, for instance, Gavin and Andre wore a popular make of trainers was not even noticed by some of the boys in the interviews. When Denis deliberately broke a toilet window it was regarded as being 'naughty', and rather wild whereas, I have the suspicion, if CT had done such a thing he would have been thought of, by some of the boys, as being a hero of counter school resistance.

### ***9.9.3 Westmoor Abbey***

The boys at Westmoor Abbey experienced far greater levels of abuse than at the other two schools. Levels of verbal and physical bullying were high and homophobia was prevalent throughout the peer group culture. There was virtually no resistance to the hegemonic pattern, (at least in class 6M) and as I have maintained above (see Section

9.5.3), all the boys practised a type of the dominant masculinity but to a greater or lesser degree. There were only three boys in class 6M who experienced ongoing subordination and Emlyn only joined the class in March. Emlyn found it difficult to form friendships and was widely disparaged. Again, the main strategies used came under the rubrics of difference and deficit. Of course Emlyn was immediately different because he had come from another school, but he was nearly everything the dominant form of masculinity was not: he worked hard, was a high academic achiever (he actually got three Level 5s in his SATs) and was thought of as a 'know-all'; he was polite and did not call out in class; he spoke with a middle class accent which the boys (and girls) castigated as 'posh'; he wore school uniform; he did not act tough and did not stick up for himself; and, he was overweight and rather unaccomplished at games and sport (particularly in terms of speed, skill, coordination, and levels of fitness). In the conversation below I am asking how Emlyn is getting on in the weekly football games where I had heard that he was playing in goal: notice the derogatory comments about the way he moves (like a goalkeeper in a computer game), his level of fitness, and about his weight which was deemed to cause an absence of bodily control:

- Chris:* He's like this right: do you know, like, on computer games when you boot the ball, yeah, he [*the goalkeeper*] catches it and then he falls on the floor, Emlyn pretends he's done a wicked dive but he's so fat, so the ball's, like, past him into the back of the net, then he dives.
- Robert:* Or if the ball's just in front of him and it's stopped/
- Chris:* He sweats well bad 'cos like he's here, Eric's there, the ball's there and he's running and he's sweating

The other two boys who were regularly bullied and subordinated were Simon and Sam

who were not close friends, but often came together by default because they were ostracised from the other friendship groups. In the next extract I am asking three boys about people who are bullied:

- Chris:* Some people, including *me*, bully Simon and Georgia, 'cos we say 'Egghead' and 'Spam' and things
- JS:* Why is Simon picked on?
- Chris:* I dunno, it's just that he's got a funny head and people say/
- Robert:* And he's got a funny voice...and he's sort of like really soft inside and so he's easy to, like/
- Chris:* Pick on
- Ryan:* He's a bit behind

The physical features again play a part but it is also because Simon is 'soft inside' and therefore the antithesis of what a boy at Westmoor Abbey needed to be like. Both Simon and Sam (and Gerogia, mentioned above) were also on the school's Special Needs Register and received extra help with their work from a Teacher's Assistant [4]. However, the main reason that Simon and Sam were subordinated was that they did not possess (or they were deficient in) any other resources to compensate and construct their masculine identities in other ways.

- JS:* Why aren't they that popular then?
- Tom:* Because, like, they don't do anything, they're not good at football, they're not good at running, they're not fast
- Eric:* You've got to be good at something to be popular
- Tom:* They ain't no good at drawing
- JS:* OK, so there's nothing that they're really good at?
- Tom:* No

### 9.10 Homophobia

We have already come across displays of homophobia in earlier parts of this thesis (see, in particular, Section 8.6), and, although it was most prevalent and persistent at Westmoor Abbey, homophobic abuse was also an enduring constituent of the peer group culture at each school. In many ways, homophobia is another aspect of masculine performance (Nayak and Kehily, 1996). Epstein (1997a:109) found that homophobia was used towards boys as a means of implying their similarity to girls, and that the terms ‘gay’ and ‘sissy’ were often used interchangeably. Many researchers (see, for example, Connell, 1990; Epstein, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Mason, 1996; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998) argue that dominant masculinity sees homosexuality as a threat and so attempts to distance itself by vilifying and oppressing it through homophobia (see Section 2.5.6 for an earlier discussion on this point). Some boys told me that they only called other boys names like ‘gay’ or ‘queer’ for a joke or a laugh, and that it was not meant to be ‘nasty’ or ‘harmful’. However, as Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) point out, these names are more than a personal insult as the victims are implicated in wider discourses of public condemnation, and so endure the abuse from an entire community. Indeed, at the very least homophobia should be regarded as a form of bullying, while other writers (see, for example, Epstein, 1996; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Skelton, 2001) argue that it should be regarded as a form of sexual harassment.

Epstein (1996) maintains that homophobia also plays a fundamental role in regulating and constructing heterosexual masculinities in schools: masculinity and heterosexuality are entwined and thus to be a ‘real’ boy (or girl) is to be heterosexual [5]. Parker (1996a) asserts that these homophobic insults should be conceptualised in terms of *gender* as opposed to *sexuality*, and that they therefore imply being ‘non-masculine’ and

‘effeminate’ rather than homosexual: however, the essential point is that homophobia is used to police and control the general behaviour of boys *and* their sexuality, and is used as a strategy to position boys at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy.

Sometimes, boys appeared to notice the seeming incongruity of calling a boy gay and a girl (almost) at the same time. As Timothy (from Highwoods) said: ‘My mum just tells me things to say to them, like, erm, well, ‘cos they also call me gay and I say, ‘Well at least I like being a girl because I can’t be gay.’ However, of course, both these terms were actually used to mean ‘other’. As I have reported in Section 7.7, boys risked derogation if they associated too closely with girls. In some ways this may seem an apparent contradiction in that when people are popular with the opposite sex it is usually taken as an expression of, and confirmation of, their heterosexuality. As Josh (from Highwoods) told me, ‘the people who hang around the girls and talk to the girls cannot be called gay’, and this could cause confusion when boys were collectively constructing others as gay. In the passage below I am talking with three other boys at Highwoods about Travis who has been referred to by some boys as gay:

- Josh:* Oh yes, he’s gay, totally gay  
*Paddy:* He took down his trousers and showed his bot at the window  
*Adam:* He kissed Jenny, didn’t he?  
*JS:* But if can kiss Jenny, how can he be gay?  
*Adam:* I think he did  
*Josh:* He didn’t, he didn’t [*getting excited*]  
*JS:* I mean that just seems/  
*Josh:* It’s weird because, I don’t know, I don’t know whether he’s gay or not  
*JS:* All right  
*Josh:* He acted gay but he’s always hangs around with the girls  
*JS:* What do you mean, ‘he acts gay’, how do you act gay?

*Josh:* I don't know

*Paddy:* Like he goes up to the boys and he starts saying to them, 'Er-er-er-er-er-er-er.'

It is interesting to see the backtracking and negotiations going on in the peer group dynamics as they try and work out the contradictions of showing your bottom at the window when changing for games and kissing a girl, and in the end Paddy is reduced to justifying the assertion of Travis's gayness by the fact that Travis makes a series of funny noises.

### ***9.11 Conclusions***

This chapter has moved to the structural level of my analysis and has traced the story of how I have classified the different types of masculinity in each school. It shows that diversity was not just a matter between the school communities, but that it also existed *within* a given setting. This means that at each school there were different ways and opportunities of learning to be a boy, or enacting boyhood. This also included learning to use their bodies, for a central theme which runs through this thesis is that the social process of embodiment is intertwined with the construction of identity, and masculinities only come into existence as people act. In these observations, the collective dimension of masculinity should also be clear: it is the peer group, not individuals, who are the conveyors of gender definitions [6].

Much of my theorising is indebted to Connell (1995, 2000) and I have appropriated his terms of hegemonic, complicit and subordinate masculinity. However, although the

overall framework of gender relations is structured between dominance and subordination, I found that I needed to create other forms and relations of masculinity and in doing so my aim is to build on and improve existing theoretical frameworks. The table below (Table 9.5) provides a summary of the different forms and relations of masculinity that I found at each school, with an outline of their main features and characteristics.

FORMS/TYPES OF MASCULINITY	HIGHWOODS	PETERSFIELD	WESTMOOR ABBEY
Hegemonic: the leading form on show	<p>(i) <u>top sportsman</u>, based on the resource of physicality/athleticism</p> <p>(ii) <u>stable/constant</u></p> <p>(iii) <u>visible</u></p> <p>(iv) conforms to school</p> <p>(v) created and sanctioned by the school</p> <p>(vi) non-violent</p>	<p>(i) being fast, skilful, strong, based on the resource of physicality/athleticism; verbal dexterity (cussing);</p> <p>(ii) unstable/fluid</p> <p>(iii) invisible</p> <p>(iv) neutral to school</p> <p>(v) <u>created by the boys</u></p> <p>(vi) underwritten by occasional violence</p>	<p>(i) <u>top sportsman</u>, based on the resource of physicality/athleticism; being tough and strong; being cheeky to teachers; wearing clothes/trainers</p> <p>(ii) <u>stable/constant</u></p> <p>(iii) <u>visible</u></p> <p>(iv) resists school</p> <p>(v) <u>created by the boys</u></p> <p>(vi) underwritten by violence</p>



Complicit: followers/imitators but without any real power or influence	-	<u>Follow, imitate the idealised form; join in with same activities of the dominant group and benefit from dividend; do not aspire to copy leaders but pursue subordinated group</u>	<u>Follow, imitate the idealised form; join in with same activities of the dominant group and benefit from dividend; do not aspire to copy leaders but pursue subordinated group</u>
Personalised/ alternative: non dominant but active	Takes many different forms: e.g. academic; computer knowledge; <u>based around similar interests</u> ; most enjoy sport, some are competent but sport is not that important to them; <u>do not aspire to copy dominant form; do not subordinate others</u>	-	Mainly in another, parallel class: hard working, academic, enjoy sport/games but do not excel. Do not mix with dominant group; have separate games of football; do not fight; <u>based around similar interests</u> ; <u>do not aspire to copy dominant form; do not subordinate others</u>
Liminal: aspirant form	<u>Watered down features of the dominant group: those boys who try to be in the top dominant group but do not have sufficient resources</u> (e.g. of speed, skill etc)	-	<u>Watered down features of the dominant group: those boys who try to be in the dominant group, but do not have sufficient resources.</u> They wear the right clothes, are cheeky to the teachers but are not sporty or tough enough etc

Subordinated, victimised and pursued	<p>(i) <b>deficit: non-athletic; non-modern; poor cultural knowledge</b></p> <p>(ii) <b>different</b> (e.g. they don't try; they have a posh voice; play different games)</p> <p>(iii) <b>Babyish/immature</b></p>	<p>(i) <b>deficit: non-athletic; non-modern; poor cultural knowledge</b></p> <p>(ii) <b>different</b> (e.g. play different games to large group)</p> <p>(iii) <b>Babyish/immature</b></p>	<p>(i) <b>deficit: non-athletic; non-modern; poor cultural knowledge</b></p> <p>(ii) <b>different</b> (e.g. non tough)</p> <p>(iii) <b>Babyish/immature</b></p> <p>(iv) SEN</p>
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Table 9.5: The different forms of masculinity, and their main features, at each school

KEY: **Phrases in bold** denote themes which can be found across all three schools

Phrases underlined denote themes which can be found in two schools

Phrases in plain text denote themes which are unique to one school

These different varieties of masculinity are organised within the overall structure of gender relations as a whole and are, essentially, patterns of gender practice. And, as we can see above, there are hierarchies of masculinity, and each of these different forms is context specific. There are similarities and differences between them, and these are the result of the different meanings and practices at each school which, in turn, give rise to the series of different options and opportunities of learning the meanings of being a boy at each school. At each school there was a leading, or exemplary, type of masculinity which held the most cultural authority. I have called these forms 'hegemonic' as they provided the dominant storylines and repertoires of action in each setting. Although I

found it more difficult to delineate the 'idealised' form at Petersfield (where it had a series of more disparate traits and qualities) it was still based around the theme of physicality/athleticism which was the single and most extensively used resource across all three schools (as we have seen in the previous three empirical chapters, Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Depending on the school setting, some of these hegemonic masculinities were more stable/unstable; some more visible/invisible; some more passive/violent; some more conformist or resistant to the formal school authority; some were created by the school practices, others invented by the boys themselves.

Although masculinity is constructed against femininity, a question that needs to be asked is whether the hegemonic form always needs to produce subordinate forms of masculinity to maintain itself? Although the answer seems to be yes, the findings in this study suggest that some hegemonic forms have a greater need and urgency to do this than others, and this is more likely to happen when it is openly challenged or threatened. At Highwoods, the dominant form was so stable and secure that there was little imperative to create and subordinate other forms, and I would argue that this shows how effectively hegemony was working. Although I have categorised alternative forms of masculinity which I have termed 'personalised' masculinities, they were only successful and accommodated because they did not directly challenge or resist the hegemonic form.

As far as I am aware liminal and personalised forms of masculinity are new categories in the theories of masculinity, or new ways of describing conduct. In some ways liminal is similar to marginalised forms but whereas Connell (1995, 2000) uses this term to describe gender forms which are produced in exploited and/or oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities, I am using liminal to categorise an aspirant type of masculinity which

is embodied by boys who would like to inhabit the world of the dominant boys but who had a deficit of sufficient personal resources. Personalised forms of masculinity are not dominant but they are active: for much of the time, and in many ways, they are more secure than the dominant forms for they are more self-contained and neither wish, or need to, challenge or subordinate other forms.

Finally, this chapter has looked at other forms which were positioned outside the legitimate modes of masculinity, and were subordinated by using the strategies of deficit and/or difference. Although I found no evidence that these boys, who were threatened, were more likely to engage in anti-feminine behaviour they, too, still attempted to construct their identities by distancing themselves from femininity. I also included a discussion on homophobia, and argued that masculinity and heterosexuality are so entwined as to be almost coterminous, and that homophobic abuse is used to control and position boys both in terms of their gender as well as their sexuality.

## Footnotes

[1] MacInnes (1998) also points out that the writers that use these typologies of masculinities often fail to explain what these various types of masculinity have in common. In other words, what distinguishes them as being masculine as opposed to feminine?, and he suggests that 'it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that all they have in common is possession of a penis' (MacInnes, 1998:63). Francis (2000) points out that this would seem to link these expressions back to essential sex differences, which is something many social constructionists would wish to avoid. However, although there is

no one form of, say, sporty masculinity, there are a number of social and culturally constructed associations which mobilise around it which I listed in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5.2). The categories of masculinity are not intended to be discrete and so, although there are undoubted exceptions, the *majority* of boys and girls do sport in different ways: in other words, there is a tendency for *most* boys to be more active and play more sport than *most* girls, and when they do it is often in more competitive ways, using more strength and aggression and so on. Moreover, boys' sports, typically, have a higher profile in the cultural life of the school (Connell, 2000).

[2] Pattman et al. (1998:140) have also tentatively suggested that there can be other masculinities which do not necessarily have to be subordinate to the dominant forms. They describe these masculine identities as being 'softer' and more 'transgressive' (than the hegemonic forms) although I find that these are rather nebulous terms. Research by Pattman (1991) and Wright (1994) found that boys who inhabit these 'softer' masculinities tended to be less misogynistic than the boys who exhibited hegemonic forms.

[3] The notion of 'other' actually derives from psychoanalysis and is central to many explanations of the constructions of gender (see, for example, Johnson, 1997; Pattman et al., 1998).

[4] 'Teacher's Assistants' or 'Support Teachers' were used at both LEA schools to support pupils with their class work and spent time in the classroom on most days.

[5] This is connected to Rich's (1983) notion of 'compulsory heterosexuality' and Wittig's (1992) proposal of the 'heterosexual contract'.

[6] Indeed, Connell (2000) points out that this is presumably why boys who are aggressive and cause a great deal of disruption when part of a group, are usually mild-mannered and amenable when on their own.

## **Chapter 10: Conclusions**

### ***10.1 Introduction***

This concluding chapter begins by returning to my original research question(s) with a reminder of how these evolved, and how they have been addressed. Following on from this short review, I precis the main issues and points raised in each chapter, and then provide a summary of the main findings and achievements which I believe make a contribution to research into young boys' masculinities (this section also includes a discussion of the issue of generalisation). Finally, I reflect on the limitations of the empirical work, including some areas which were not explored, and suggest some potential directions that may be taken up for future research.

### ***10.2 The research question***

The main focus of this thesis has been the research into how pre-adolescent boys construct their masculine identities in three schools differentiated by the social characteristics of their intake. More specifically, I have considered how official school practices work to produce particular ways of being a (school) boy, and explored the various strategies and resources the boys were able to draw on to establish status within their own peer group.

The original motivation for this study came from my personal experiences as a junior school teacher, and the wish to investigate life at school from the pupils' perspective; to find out the meanings and interpretations that they attributed to school policies and practices, and how they organised and saw their social world. The relationship between the boys' lives at school and its structure is, essentially, an issue about their masculinity (Connell, 2000), and I decided on a comparative study to see how constructions of masculinity were affected by three different settings. Over the period in which I have worked on this thesis, questions about boys (and men) have continued to arouse a considerable amount of media interest, public/government concern and controversy (see, for example, Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Connell, 2000; Skelton, 2001), and this has also been accompanied by a burgeoning academic focus on masculinity. The study confirms that masculinity is contextually and culturally specific, and that the different experiences and opportunities in each setting result in the boys' masculinity being expressed in a variety of ways. Although there were also similarities in the types of masculinity across the three sites, this is not to say that masculinity has any essentialist qualities, but rather that there are common patterns which can be observed. The ultimate aim of this study is to produce both theoretical developments and empirical revelations concerning the construction of young boys' masculinities, particularly within the school setting, and the main outcomes of the research are presented in Section 10.4.

### *10.3 The issues raised and the main points from the chapters*

The opening chapter states the main research questions, establishes the motivation for the study, and briefly outlines the theoretical and methodological approaches. It also sets the study against the background of 'boys' underachievement', and provides a summary of



the forthcoming chapters. Chapters two to four concern theoretical and methodological issues, while Chapters five to nine presents and discusses the empirical findings.

The second chapter points out the main theoretical frameworks that I have drawn on in this study which involve Giddens's theory of structuration, symbolic interactionism, and the feminist inspired theories of masculinity which include, in particular, the work of Connell: I also define how I used key conceptual terms such as 'identity', 'embodiment' and 'power'. My contention throughout this study is that the boys have agency to choose how to conduct their lives, albeit within a particular historical and structural context. They are skilled and knowledgeable social agents who know a great deal about the school they attend; they are able to discuss knowledgeably and reflexively about their own peer group, the relations of power, and general school routines, and although they probably have only an imprecise awareness of aspects of the wider society that influences the context of where their activity takes place, they are able to take action as far as their structural position allows them to in the form of using a range of symbolic resources and strategies. The chapter also highlights the important theme in this thesis of embodiment which can both potentiate and constrain ways of being male, and I argue that the body is a site of contestation between the attempted control of the school and the agency of the pupils.

This argument is taken up further in Chapter 3 which concerns the institution of the school where the research takes place. Schools are viewed as a key site in the construction of masculinity, and, although affected by wider structures, each has its own collection of localised 'storylines' and set of masculinising practices and processes. I maintain that the school is a locus of control, regulation, power and surveillance, and

emphasise their increasing marketisation within the discourses of 'school effectiveness' and 'raising standards'. I have tried to capture the multilayered nature of everyday life in schools and, as an analytical device have distinguished between the formal and informal layers. In this chapter I also discuss the concept of 'the child' and 'childhood' which I hold to be adult-centred, historically changing constructions, and I examine consequences that arise when adults research young children, and address issues of confidentiality and consent. Finally, I supply a broad definition of the term 'ethnography': I highlight a number of its salient features, and list a range of skills a researcher needs to acquire and use.

Chapter 4 presents details of the design and conduct of the study, providing information on sampling, and of the methods employed and the methodological issues which arose. The two leading methods of gathering data came from semi-participant observation and group interviews with the boys. After describing the processes of fieldwork, I appraise the status and validity of the data: I argue that interviews are, essentially, a social construct, or artifice, where people present a series of different facades; I address issues of triangulation, contamination and reactivity, and highlight that the researcher is an integral and inescapable part of the process, making the point that we see things not so much as *they* are but as *we* are. Although I acknowledge that this thesis is a textually constructed account, I do not consider my account to be fiction, and I want to emphasise the cultural and social materiality of my analysis which is about corporeal people living their own 'real' lives. After describing the process of transcription of interviews and fieldnotes, the final section looks at issues of analysis and writing up which is, fundamentally, about the process of representation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). I affirm that I have an obligation to make the process as transparent and unambiguous as possible,

and to demonstrate how the ongoing principles of selection were used through the analysis to the presentation of my findings. I examine the dialogic relation between theory and data, and describe the processes and advantages involved in using NUD\*IST, particularly in conceptually organising and coding data. Finally, in this chapter, I explore the problematic of transforming data during the process of analysis, writing and representation, where I view my role as analogous to a translator moving from the empirical material into a language which is able to describe what is happening and going on.

Chapter 5 is the first chapter of the empirical section and provides contextual information about the three school settings and, in particular, the features of their formal culture. It is organised under five headings which consider the physical sites; the catchment area and parental dispositions; the schools' ethos; their structures of management and policies of organisation; and the headteachers, class teachers and classroom milieu. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the criteria I have used to classify each school on the basis of the social characteristics of its intake.

The boys in this study are introduced in Chapter 6 where I also present the main features of the informal pupil culture in each school. An important argument in this thesis is that the peer group is one of the most influential features of school life, and its strict cultural codes mean that there is a strong incentive for boys to conform to its norms and expectations. I also contend that it is the peer groups, not individual boys, which are the bearers of definitions of masculinity. The chapter also considers the structure of the various friendship groups, and analyses the characteristics of a number of key individual boys who were viewed by the boys as leaders, and who, in many ways, embodied the

features of the leading, exemplary, forms of masculinity in each school. I introduce the concept of 'resource', and argue that the boys' position in the peer group hierarchy was determined by the array of social, cultural, physical, intellectual and economic resources that each boy was able to draw on and accumulate. However, I also point out that the values accorded to these resources vary in each setting, which may, in turn, also be dependent on prevalent storylines in the wider culture. Finally, I present information on pupil SAT scores which suggests a strong correlation between school academic performance and social class, although, contrary to average national performance, in this study boys generally outperformed girls.

Chapter 7 is set in the institutional setting of the school and analyses relations between the formal and informal cultures. Although there are different meanings and practices at each school, a main finding was that the majority of boys negotiated a successful affiliation between the demands of their teachers and their peers, and formed a pragmatic compromise with the formal school regime. I argue that most boys are aware of the connections between examination success and better career options (and material rewards they can bring), and they, therefore, have a utilitarian view of the school and use it as a resource which provides a means to an end. Although there were risks involved in too-close an allegiance to the formal regime, I draw attention to the fact that high academic performance and attainment in class was not necessarily incompatible with peer group popularity and status, and had a neutral effect in 6P at Highwoods and 6H at Petersfield. Although most school rules were designed to regulate and control the body, I report that the vast majority of the pupils saw rules as being implemented in their own interests. Although there was varying amounts of resistance to the formal regime at each school, I found no evidence of a significant counter-school culture similar to those described in

previous secondary school studies, and although there were far greater amounts of opposition and defiance at Westmoor Abbey, I argue that these boys did not completely reject the authority of the school. I highlight the crucial role of the teacher in relations of discipline, and maintain that much of the boys' disruptive behaviour is linked to the performative nature of masculinity which they used as a strategy to gain popularity and status. After briefly discussing the boys' responses to competitive reward systems, the final section reports on cross-gender relations and their effect on the formation of masculine identities. I found that, although there were different amounts of interaction at each school, boys and girls tended to keep mainly apart. Despite the imperative for boys to categorise girls as 'other', I argue that the boys classified the girls as 'different' rather than 'oppositional'. The data presented also shows that girls have the capability to invert power relations and exert power over boys.

Chapter 8 analyses the boys' own culture and, specifically, considers the notion of status, which leads to position within the peer group hierarchy, and which, I argue, is a fundamental constituent of boys' constructions of masculinity. The chapter presents the different types of resources and strategies that the boys are able to draw on and argues that these opportunities are contingent on the conditions found in each school. I have classified these options as being either open (possible), restricted (difficult) or closed (virtually impossible). The study reports that the single most highly honoured resource across all three schools was physicality/athleticism which was a leitmotiv throughout this study; the boys defined themselves through bodily practices, and they can be seen being shaped (literally) by manifestations of their physical prowess. I want to make it clear again that, rather than viewing these physical practices as expressions of an already existing masculinity, I am arguing that masculinity was brought into being through these

practices. I also present and discuss other embodied resources that the boys employed, which include acting tough/hard using humour and wit (including cussing), wearing fashionable clothes/training shoes, and possessing culturally-acclaimed knowledge. Finally, I consider the status of having a girlfriend, although this type of relationship was largely anomalous in this study.

The final chapter of the empirical section, Chapter 9, moves to the structural level of my analysis. Eschewing the use of pupil typologies, which I found were unable to portray the intricacies of the boys' identities, I conceptualised the different patterns of masculinity by considering the relations between them, and this allows us to see masculinity as a way in which the boys' interpersonal practices were organised. The chapter shows that diversity was not just a matter *between* schools, it also existed *within* schools: in other words, at each school, there were different ways of learning to be a boy, and different ways of learning to use their bodies, or, there were multiple pathways which produced a series of diverse patterns and outcomes. I have taken Connell's (1995) term of 'hegemonic masculinity' to describe the leading forms of masculinity which tended to regulate thought and action, and acted as the 'standard-bearer of what it means to be a "real" ...boy' (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997:119-120). Although these forms were context-specific, they were still constructed and performed around the physicality of the body. Although I have also utilised Connell's terms of 'complicit' and 'subordinate', I found it necessary to propose other forms and relations of masculinity which I have called 'liminal' and 'personalised'. Liminal forms are an aspirant type of masculinity found in boys who wished to be like the top boys but who had insufficient resources, while personalised forms were exhibited by boys who appeared content to pursue their own types of identity and had no desire to emulate the leading form. The final section of

the chapter discusses subordinate forms of masculinity which were persecuted using the generic strategies of difference and/or deficit. An important component of hegemonic masculinity is homophobia which has associations with the fear of being thought homosexual: although masculinity is coterminous with heterosexuality, I argue that homophobic abuse is primarily used as a strategy to position boys at the bottom of the peer group hierarchy and can, therefore, be conceptualised in terms of *gender* rather than *sex*.

#### ***10.4 The main findings and contributions to research***

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:17) state that research is, and must remain ‘the production of knowledge’, and this thesis has produced new findings which add to current understandings of sociological theories of masculinity, particularly those concerned with young boys in the school setting. While some findings are a confirmation and endorsement of theories and conclusions that have already been published in academic literature, I believe others contain a greater element of originality in that they come directly from my own understandings, interpretations and theorisations in this study.

In common with a number of other researchers in this field, this study theorises a hegemonic type of masculinity which regulates thought and action by defining what a ‘real’ boy should be like: in other words it defines the norm. The hegemonic form subordinates other forms of masculinity, and while some types resist and even challenge, many are complicit in their subordination. *However*, many studies emphasise a hegemonic/subordinate binary and do not mention other patterns of masculinity, and I

have found it necessary to propose other forms and relations of masculinity which I have called 'liminal' and 'personalised'. These may be seen as new ways of naming masculine conduct. Liminal forms are an aspirant type of masculinity displayed by boys who wished to emulate the top boys but who had a deficit of adequate resources, while personalised forms were embodied in those who appeared content to pursue their own types of identity, and did not aspire to, or wish to imitate, the leading form. At one of the schools (Highwoods) these were the majority of boys.

I have shown that there were different options and opportunities to perform different types of masculinity in each setting, and these were affected by the different 'storylines' or 'repertoires of action' (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998) (or the meanings and practices) that were available in each setting. In each school, I have argued that some of these are open (possible), some are restricted (difficult), while others are closed (virtually impossible to access). While some of the storylines in this study were visible, others were almost hidden; some were more stable, others more fragile; and while some were endorsed by the official school culture, others were created by the boys themselves.

The boys' position in the peer group hierarchy was determined by the array of social, cultural, physical, intellectual and economic resources that each boy is able to draw on and accumulate. I have argued that these are, ultimately, symbolic in that their power depends on the meanings and values that these different resources are accorded, which in turn, are dependent upon powerful narratives both within the localised setting and the wider culture. The most esteemed or cherished resource that the boys drew on across all three schools to gain status was physicality/athleticism in the form of strength, power, skill, fitness and speed. I have also delineated other resources/strategies which were



employed, and these included humour (including cussing); the wearing of fashionable items of clothing ('makes', logos); and having culturally-valued knowledge (of football, PlayStation etc). Having a girlfriend had a very minor effect on status. The most detrimental effect on a boys' status came by acting, or by perceived as being, 'immature' and/or babyish. I have also suggested that many boys categorised girls as 'different' rather than 'other'; indeed the majority of boys ignored girls, and very few went out of their way to traduce all things feminine.

In this thesis I maintain that masculinity comes into existence as people act, and refers to bodies and what bodies do: thus, the part played by the physical body, and the concept of embodiment, form a major part of the findings. The boys were aware that they were judged by their bodies: many were consciously concerned about its maintenance and appearance, and understood its significance, both as a resource and as a social symbol which communicated signs/messages about their identity. There was a struggle over the body between the school and the boys which was a contestation between control against agency: whilst the official practices of the school attempted to regulate and control the bodies to render them docile and receptive, the boys in this study were full of activity and agency and often resisted these attempts.

Other findings in this thesis tend to support and affirm theories and conclusions that have been previously proposed by other educational researchers. For example, like Connell et al. (1982), Pollard (1985) and Gordon et al. (2000a) I have categorised two main cultures in schools which are related and interdependent on each other: the official/formal culture of the school (including the management/policy, organisations, teaching/pedagogy), and, the unofficial/informal culture of the pupils (which also includes pupil-teacher relations).

I found that pupils needed to negotiate a balance between the expectations of these two sources of support. Further, like Connell et al., (1982), Pollard (1985) and Pollard and Filer (1996), I have proposed that the pupils' choices were quite limited: they could conform and comply or resist, but the vast majority formed a pragmatic accommodation with the school regime. Contrary to media and 'common sense' public perceptions, many boys worked hard at school and understood that they needed to work in order to pass the examinations which, in turn, would lead to better job (and material) prospects. They viewed, and used, school as a means to an end. There was a strong association between academic attainment and social class, and the upper-middle and middle class boys achieved relatively higher results than those from working class backgrounds. Drawing on feminist inspired researchers (see, for example, Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connolly, 1998; Francis, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Connell, 2000; Skelton, 2001), I have maintained that masculinity is a social construction and means different things to different people in different places. The boys constructed, negotiated and performed a range of different masculinities in each school setting, and so there were different ways of *doing boy*. It is my contention that an important task of education is to show that there are a diverse range of acceptable models of masculinity which exist outside the narrow forms commonly offered, and this study draws attention to alternative forms. Of course, if masculinity is 'natural' it cannot be changed but this research confirms the opposite to be true: masculinity is continually shaped by social (and political) power and is, therefore, open to change (see Connell, 2000).

There was a hierarchy of masculinities and one type assumed a dominant, hegemonic, form, although it contained a number of different features/characteristics in each setting, but a major signifier of successful masculinity was sport and its associated

physicality/athleticism (see, for example, Messner and Sabo, 1990; Connell, 1995; Parker, 1996b; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). Some masculinities were subordinated, and the most common strategy employed was to invoke the concept of 'difference' or 'other' (and also of 'deficit' or deficiency). These boys at the bottom of the pupil hierarchy were also often positioned by feminising them, and by using the strategy of homophobic abuse (see Parker, 1996a). The different ways of being a boy were affected by the official school culture, and each particular school institution (their policies, organisation, personnel etc) make a difference to the way pupils experience their lives at school. However, they, in turn, are also connected to wider structures which also may have major effects: these include, parental/family attitudes and expectations, the neighbourhood, popular media culture, commodified cultures, and government policy (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998).

Finally, I have confirmed that one of the most important features of the school setting is the boys' peer group, and the construction of masculinity was the outcome of intricate and often intense manoeuvring (see, for example, Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Adler and Adler, 1998; Connolly, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Harris, 1998; Connell, 2000). This thesis advocates that masculinity is, primarily, a collective enterprise, and it is the peer group, not individual boys, which are the bearers of gender definitions (Connell, 2000; Lesko, 2000).

#### *10.4.1 The possibility of generalisation*

Although some social theorists such as Denzin (1983), or Guba and Lincoln (1982, 1994), assert that generalisation from interpretive research is impossible, the problem

may arise from definitions of the term. For instance, if we take generalisation to mean a 'general notion or proposition obtained by inference from particular cases' (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*), we may find interpretive research to be full of generalisations. Although there are limits to generalising possibilities in interpretive research, Williams (2000:210) argues that generalisation is actually unavoidable and that 'every reported study will contain at least some kinds of generalising claim'.

However, when Williams (2000) argues that generalisations are actually an inevitable constituent of interpretive research, he is actually alluding to *moderatum* generalisations which refer to 'the life world' (Schutz, 1972). In other words, they are the generalisations of everyday life, and the basis for these 'common-sense' understandings is, what Williams (2000) calls, the 'cultural consistency' of the 'shared world of meaning' (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979:6). Although *moderatum* generalisations can, by definition, only be moderate, perhaps they do not need to be anything else. Although this study of boys' micro-level interactions in a school setting only detail a small part of society, it can still, in Williams's (2000:211) words, be used to 'paint a picture of this wider society'. In other words, I am inferring from specific instances to the characteristics of the wider social world. Indeed, my intention is to argue that this localised study is able to make sense of the boys' actions, and understand how they make meanings, and that these experiences can become *moderatum* generalisations that can form the basis of theories of wider social process or structure. Conversely, these theories of social process and structure can be further understood through the way they affect these particular, personal lives.

## *10.5 The limitations of the empirical research and future areas for research*

### *10.5.1 Sexuality and the role of the unconscious*

One important theme that I have not directly addressed in this study is that of sexuality, both in terms of its practices, and as a major constituent of identity. Indeed, Mac an Ghaill (1994) argues that sexual orientation is the primary source of identity and social behaviour, and although it could be argued that sexuality has greater salience amongst older children in the secondary sector, researchers such as Epstein (1997a, 1997b), Connolly (1998) and Renold (1999) have shown that the primary school is also a key arena for the production of hetero/sexualities.

However, although I have not explored this theme explicitly, sexuality is, nevertheless, embedded throughout the study. I have, for instance, argued that masculinities are produced through a 'heterosexual matrix', which acts as a regulatory and defining 'norm' (Butler, 1990, 1993), and have discussed the role, and purposes, that lie behind the prevalent and pervasive use of homophobic harassment. I have accentuated the fact that masculinity (also femininity) and heterosexuality are intrinsically linked and, therefore, all the possible ways of *doing* boy were actually ways of *doing* 'heterosexual' boy.

Many contemporary writers working in the field of masculinity also stress the role of the unconscious (see, for example Butler, 1990, 1993; Elliott, 1992; Frosh, 1991, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Redman, 1996, 1998; Redman and Mac an Ghaill, 1996), while Redman and Mac an Ghaill (1997:175) maintain that 'the production and reproduction of masculinities within the school can [...] be said to be driven by unconscious processes'. In this study I have only tacitly acknowledged the unconscious, but despite this, I wish to argue, once again, that the theme of the unconscious is embedded throughout. I am

certainly not pretending to gainsay the role of the unconscious (with all its emotional subtexts), and many of the social actions taken by the pupils or adults in this study undoubtedly, stem from, and are driven by unconscious motivations and desires. For example, writers such as Butler (1990) and Epstein and Johnson (1998) have underlined the link between homophobia and the unconscious (see Section 2.5.6). However, the focus of my study is to try and *describe what is happening*, rather than trying to seek out ‘inner’ psychological/psychoanalytical explanations and reasons behind it. Indeed, my intention is not to either dispute or deny the importance of either sexuality and/or the role of the unconscious, but merely to recognise that they were not a direct part of my research question, and, as such, I did not ask the right questions to pursue them.

#### ***10.5.2 Ethnicity and parental dispositions***

Despite the possibility for some generalisation, the confines of a PhD thesis have nevertheless limited the size and the scale of this study. For example, the three schools were chosen to provide differences in the social class of their intake, but they were not sufficiently diverse in ethnicity to allow for this variable to be taken into consideration. This means that although I am able to make statements about the effect of social class on, for example, the boys’ attitudes to schooling and their academic performance, and the ways they expressed their physicality, I am unable to make any strong statements about the effect of their ethnicity. Moreover, I am also unable to make any assertions on the basis of the complex interaction between class and ethnicity (see Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). Likewise, the dispositions of the boys’ parents have similar profound effects on their own attitudes towards schooling. I have argued that parents play a crucial part in the ways a school is able to function, and different parental aspirations and expectations

lead to different possibilities. I have also postulated that the middle classes tend to put a higher value on education and generally have higher levels of support for the school, and there is evidence for this, for instance, in the number boys that had home-tutors at Petersfield, or the parental disdain of curricula matters at Westmoor Abbey. However, I chose not to investigate parental dispositions and their involvement in the processes of schooling in any systematic manner.

### *10.5.3 Suggestions for future research*

However these omissions suggest a number of possible directions for further sociological research within the field of young boys' masculinities. Although Connolly (1998) in the infant school, and Mac an Ghaill (1988, 1994) and Sewell (1997) in the secondary sector, have explored the effects of ethnicity as an important factor in the formation of identity, ethnic masculinity remains a neglected area of research in the junior school. An in-depth study of the salience of ethnicity on the ways of *doing* boy would be a welcome addition to the research on young boys' masculinities, not only comparing differences *between* ethnicities, but exploring difference *within* them as well. Another study could also focus on how ethnicity relates to variations within and between social classes with respect to identities and relations to schooling. Likewise, I have also mentioned above that parental aspirations and levels of support have a profound effect on young boys' identities and attitudes to schooling, and although interrelations between masculinity, schooling and the local community have already been considered by such researchers as Pollard and Filer (1996, 1999), Skelton (1996) and Connolly (1998), another study could build on this work and address the issue of differences in social class [1].

Although the original intention in this study was to explore masculinities in two age groups of boys, Year 3 (7-8 year olds) and Year 6 (10-11), constraints of time, and concerns about 'lack of depth', meant that I finally decided to concentrate solely on boys in Year 6. There has been little ethnographic, in-depth, research carried out on masculinities in the lower junior school, that is 7-9 year olds in Years 3 and 4. Jordan (1995) and Connolly (1998) have studied infant school boys (mainly 6 year olds, Year 2); Skelton (1997) has explored the relationships between 6-7 year old (Year 2, infant) boys and 9-10 year old (Year 5, junior) boys in two different schools; while Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) and Renold (1999) have studied boys who are coming towards the end of the junior school lives. In the USA, Thorne (1993) has compared two age groups of both boys and girls (5-6 year olds in kindergarten, with 8-9 year olds), and Adler and Adler's (1998) study began with their own two children which turned into an 8 year long ethnographic exploration of preadolescent boys and girls. Although this American research has coincided and overlapped with the lower junior age group nothing has been carried out specifically targeted at boys of this age. A larger comparative study of say, Year 3 and Year 6 boys could (for example) chart similarities and differences in their dispositions to schooling; their relations with girls; see if each year group used the same strategies, and classified themselves by drawing on the same resources; whether the body played such a paramount part in the constructions of their masculine identities and so forth.

A number of researchers (see, for example, Connell, 2000; Willis, 2000) point out the close links of peer culture to mass communications and commodified cultures, and these generate images and interpretations of masculinity that are reworked by the pupils through their actions and everyday conversations. Some writers such as Klein (2000) and



Willis (2000) claim that the pervasive force of commodified style culture is beginning to have significant effects on the formation of identities, weakening and even transcending the influence of the other sites such as social class. Many commodities are deliberately targeted at young children. This study begins to chart some of its effects, particularly with the logo-marked clothing worn by the pupils at Westmoor Abbey, which for them was not only a way of belonging but a way of being, and it would seem that there is a need for more research in this area.

Finally, there is also the potential to carry out a longitudinal study, following Year 6 boys into the secondary school and investigating and comparing the changing storylines in the different sectors of schooling. A study could even, like Willis's (1977), follow the boys into the job market. For, if we can 'pan back' a little and put this study in a wider structural perspective, it becomes possible to see how localised these meanings of masculinity really are. The meanings that have been constructed in each of the three schools soon lose their potency and effect when taken outside the local area. For instance, Dan's macho form of masculinity from Westmoor Abbey would make a very poor impression at Highwoods, and even the most subordinated boy at Highwoods will probably do much better (in terms of career prospects/level of income) than the leading/dominant boys at Westmoor Abbey.

**Footnotes**

[1] Although Pollard and Filer (1996, 1999) explore the effect (through case studies) of the home on a primary school child's identity and their orientation to learning, they do not consider the effect of social class in a systematic way.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Coding from fieldnotes

This is an example from my field diary below which is taken from observations made on a whole-school assembly at Highwoods early on in my field work. Like all observations, the page begins with a note of the time, date and context.

*Highwoods Assembly, Monday morning, 9.25.*

*(21.9.98) In gym. Whole school assembly [the only time in the week that the whole the school comes together]*

I follow the class in. The entrance by the pupils is quite noisy, there is a lot of chatting. We're the last class in. The teachers are already there, they sit at the front and down one side of the hall. On show, watching the pupils. Hall/gym looks rather old, made of wood, a bit dilapidated. The deputy head [Mr Hudson] stands up and gives three short claps. The children stop pretty much at once –almost instant control. The children sit in long rows with in their classes and age groups; youngest at the front, eldest in back row (as usual). All girls and all boys sit together in single sex groups – I can't see any on their own. All in perfect uniform. Assembly taken by deputy head. Begins with sports reports.

Teachers stand up, one at a time and deliver their reports. All men wear suits or jackets with ties. PE teachers are in tracksuits. In order, they go netball A's, netball B's, rugby A's, rugby B's etc. There's quite a few of them. The reports are often highly individualised, referring to pupils by name who have performed particularly well. (Themes of effort,

SURVEILLANCE

DISCIPLINE

CONTROL

DIFFERENTIATION BY  
AGE/GENDER

UNIFORMITY

SPORT

SPORT/PRAISE

PERFORMANCE

individual/collective skill).The pupils seem to listen attentively. Very little fidgeting. Next, Mr M. reads out detention list for those who have conduct marks. It's very public. About 8 names on it, one girl's name. They have to see him after assembly. (Find out more about how system works etc).	COMPETITIVENESS
Next, Mr M. tells school about a wasps nest. Some boys have been playing with a wasps nest and one has been badly stung. They were in the wrong place (wrong time as well). Next, he tells them of a boy from another school who has been run over by a car and killed. Warns school about crossing road in the proper place. Gives warning that any pupil caught crossing road at the wrong place (i.e. not on the pelican crossing, will be banned from going over to senior school to play 'fives'. Next, a short prayer. Pupils close eyes, some teachers as well (not me, obviously). It's about thanking God for looking after me (pretty standard). Finally, there are a few messages from the teachers which they stand up and deliver. They're about lunchtime/after-school clubs, choir etc. Pupils are dismissed by their class. Year 8 are first. No music or singing. I follow my class out. Assembly has lasted about 20 minutes. Bell goes for first lesson as we leave.	RULES DISCIPLINE SANCTIONS
	RULES
	RULES SANCTIONS
	CHRISTIANITY MORALS
	INSTITUTION/ REGULATIONS

Sometimes, further thoughts and/or interpretations can be triggered by entries into the field diary, and be written about retrospectively. For instance, I wrote a further analysis of the assemblies I saw in each school but did not have space to include this in the main text. The example below is about the first assembly I saw at Petersfield.

Great emphasis is placed on the manner the pupils enter and leave the hall, and is again about how schools attempt to regulate and control embodiment and

spatiality. The pupils enter and sit down quietly, waiting to be addressed with their eyes facing the front. Mrs Flowers homilies usually take the form of stories/discourses containing a moral message: most of the pupils seem to be engaged; there is little fidgeting but I cannot say the same for the teachers. When assembly is finished, the pupils are required to remain seated in their line until their class is given permission to stand and walk out quietly without talking.

## **Appendix 2: Pupil interview schedule from Petersfield**

### **PUPIL INTERVIEW: PETERSFIELD SPRING TERM**

NAME..... DATE.....

#### **PETERSFIELD**

- \* What do you think of Petersfield?
- \* Good, bad points? What are the best things/worst things about Petersfield?
- \* Best/worst times of the week
- \* What is the most popular playground games activity in Year 6?
- \* What do you feel about all the locks and fences etc?

#### **PEER GROUP FEATURES/CHARACTERISTICS**

Describe them

What do you like about the people who are your friends? What makes them your friend?  
 What is it about these people who are not your friends? What have they got, or have not got?  
 Do boys and girls mix together?

#### **POPULAR PUPILS/TYPE OF PERSON**

Who is the most popular boy in the class/the Year group?  
 why?  
 Who is the most popular girl in the class/the Year group?  
 why?  
 What sort of person would you have to be if you wanted to be really popular at Petersfield (admired)  
 Is there a best joke teller; part played by humour  
 Is there one hard boy? Who is/are the hardest?

#### **UNPOPULAR PUPILS**

Is there any one who is often on their own/nobody likes, is unpopular etc do you know why

### SHOWING OFF

Do you think people show off in front of their friends? Examples, reasons?

### CLOTHING

What sort of fashions are there at Petersfield? Trainers, haircuts, logos, design labels

### SPORT

What do you think of the sport at Petersfield?

Do you have to be good at sport to be thought of highly at Petersfield?

Do you have to be a sporty-type of person?

### TEACHERS

What do you think of the teachers? Reasons

### SCHOOL RULES

What do you think about the school rules?

Do you feel that you are quite tightly controlled, or watched?

Are any rules unfair?

Do you try and get away with anything?

### BULLYING/TEASING?

Is there any bullying at Petersfield?

Have you ever been bullied? Example?

What about teasing?

Is there a lot of name calling?

### NAME-CALLING (BOFFS ETC)

How much name calling goes on? Why?

### CUSSING

Tell me about cussing. Who does it? How widespread is it?

### HOMOPHOBIA

Being called gay etc

How often does it happen?

If so, when?

## **RACISM**

Is there any racism? (language etc, examples)

## **FIGHTING**

Are there any fights?

When? What happens?

## **YEAR 6 PRIVILEGE**

Is there such a thing as Year 6 privilege? (or equivalent)

## **HOME TUTORS**

Do you have a home tutor; for how much a week; who else has one?

## **SCHOOL WORK**

What do you think of school work? Likes/dislikes

Working hard: What do you think of working hard? Is it cool?

Would you work hard because you enjoy the work, or for instrumental reasons - you want to do well in the SATs, get good GCSE's, get a good job etc.

Out of 10, how much of the work do you enjoy? say, 5/10 for half of the time

## **COMPETITIVENESS**

Do people try and compete against each other?

Do you ever get embarrassed to ask the teacher if you don't know anything?

Do you ever feel that you have to prove yourself? (either academically, or by acting tough etc)

## **PRESSURISED**

Do you ever feel pressurised? When, give examples

Do you ever think you're on show all the time, people are watching you?

Home work?

## **LIFE OUTSIDE SCHOOL**

Do you think your life is very different from the life you lead inside school, at Petersfield? If so, how, in what ways?

## **PERSONAL AMBITIONS**

Do you know what you want to be when you grow up?

Do you expect to go to university; get a good job; a well paid job?

What do you parents want you to be?

#### REWARDS/SANCTIONS

What are they? Do they work?

#### BOYS AND GIRLS

What do you think of the girls/boys?

What are the similarities/differences: friendship groups; attitude to school work; working practices; taking pride in work; not minding if they work hard (not being teased if they do)



### **Appendix 3: Teacher interview schedule from Petersfield**

#### **SPRING TERM**

#### **INTERVIEW WITH ROGER HUGHES**

##### **CAREER**

How long have you been at Petersfield?

##### **THE SURROUNDING AREA**

Are parents generally supportive? What are the main kinds of parental pressures?  
What criteria do you think the parents judge Petersfield? Is it on the SATs/Ofsted?

##### **SCHOOL RULES**

There seems to be a lot of rules: would you say the pupils are pretty tightly controlled/regulated?  
School uniform: wearing trainers (some try and get away with it); tying jumpers round waist? How much are you bothered?

##### **DISCIPLINE**

Is there a tendency for behaviour to deteriorate as the pupils get older? (Certain classes/teachers etc)  
Behaviour as a gender issue?  
Reward systems?  
Sanctions? How effective?  
Cussing?  
Bullying?  
Homophobia?  
Racism?

## THE PUPILS

(There seems to be 2 groups of boys)

Who are the natural leaders?

What sort of things makes them so?

What sort of things gives a pupil status at Petersfield?

There seems to be good work ethic in your class (the school?) Do you agree. Why do you think this is so? How much is down to the parents?

Mixing of boys/girls

## MISCELLANEOUS

What do you think of the SATs? Have they become a public exam?

Higher scores: does it mean that standards are rising?

Do teachers evaluate/assess each other (subject coordinators?)

Sport: there doesn't seem to be much here?

## **Appendix 4: Coding categories from NUD\*IST 4 (The 119 nodes).**

### **NODES**

#### **CASE DATA**

School: Highwoods

School: Petersfield

School: Westmoor Abbey

Pupil gender: boy

Pupil gender: girl

Pupil gender: mixed

Term of interview: autumn

Term of interview: spring

Term of interview: summer

Types of masculinity: dominant

Types of masculinity: alternative

Types of masculinity: marginalised

Types of masculinity: subordinated

#### **FORMAL SCHOOL CULTURE**

Academic policies/organisation

Rules and regulations

Classifications

Differentiations

School uniform

Examinations/tests

Reward systems

Sanctions

Discipline and control

Sport/games

Assemblies

Midday assistants and other personnel

Boys' underachievement

## INFORMAL SCHOOL CULTURE

Friendship groupings

Pupil categorisations

Breaktime

General interests/talking points

Relations with other boys

Relations with girls

Relations with younger pupils

Relations with older pupils

Narrative stories, humour

Ambitions/expectations

Life outside school

Parents

Secondary school

Functions/purpose of a school

Sticking up for mates

Ideal pupil

Name-calling, such as 'boff'

Intelligence, academic achievement

Being nice and kind

Football

Leaders

Being popular

Being unpopular

Feeling lonely

Swearing

Boasting

Being naughty, bad behaviour

Complaining, moaning

Proving yourself

## RESISTANCE

Deviancy

Confrontation

Fighting

## SCHOOL WORK

Working hard/showing a positive attitude

Working hard for enjoyment  
 Working hard for instrumental reasons  
 Working poorly  
 Relations with teachers: good  
 Relations with teachers: poor  
 Relations with teachers: being told off  
 Homework  
 Home tutors  
 Pressures due to school

## STRATEGIES OF GAINING STATUS

Physicality/athleticism  
 Physicality/athleticism and skill in formal games  
 Physicality/athleticism and skill in informal games  
 Physicality/athleticism: strength  
 Physicality/athleticism: intimidation  
 Physicality/athleticism: speed  
 Presentation of image  
 Presentation of image through clothing  
 Academic ability/intelligence  
 By cussing (verbal wit)  
 Cussing: examples  
 Up-to-date knowledge  
 Displaying competence  
 By being anti-school  
 Respect: being wise or helpful  
 Having a girlfriend  
 Showing effort  
 By humour  
 Acting tough and hard

## SUBORDINATION

Bullying: verbal  
 Bullying: physical  
 Homophobia  
 Being called a girl  
 Displaying babyish behaviour  
 Misogyny

Racism

Through sport/games

By difference

Accent/register

Being posh

Conforming to school

For working hard

Non-modern, not up-to-date

Lack of knowledge

Non-active

By weight

By crying

Telling teacher

Unintelligent, poor work

Being wimpy

#### GENERAL THEMES

Competitiveness

Pupil negotiations

Pupil perceptiveness

Performing

Pupil behaviour

Having fun

Sport in general

The body

Use of space

Time

Confidentiality in interview

**Appendix 5: The games/PE clothing list for a Year 6 boy at Highwoods**

Swimming trunks plain (navy or red)  
Swimming hat (white or red)  
Sports towel, multicoloured (see notes)  
Track suit  
Athletic vest, House colours  
White Polo shirt, short sleeved, House colours  
Gym shorts, white  
Rugby shorts, navy  
Rugby jersey, navy  
Rugby jersey, white  
Rugby socks, navy  
Socks, short white  
Gym shoes or trainers, white (for indoor use)  
Trainers, white (for outdoor use)  
Football boots  
School sports bag  
Swimming bag  
Cricket sweater, trimmed  
Cricket shirt  
Cricket trousers  
White trainers

## Appendix 6: Girls' friendship groups at the three schools

### A.6.1 Highwoods (6J and 6B)

Girls in 6J	Girls in 6B
Diana	Claudia
Fern	Colette
	Ingrid
Julia	
Louise	Kamana
	Shereen
Claire	
Sakhi	



**A.6.2 Petersfield (6H)**

Girls
Katie
Hannah
Lizzie
Fiona
Candy
Lara
Deborah
Anika
Frances
Priscilla
Patty
Rana
Mary
Divia
Nadine
Semira
Julia
Seema

**A.6.3 Westmoor Abbey (6M)**

Girls
Clara
Tammy
Martha
Shannon
Leah
Debbie
Jessie
Dawn
Georgia
Billie
Amber
Angela
Cosina

## Appendix 7: Pupils' academic performance in each school

### A. 7.1: Pupil profiles at Highwoods; SAT scores.

KEY: n.a. means information not applicable or information not available

\* took Level 6 in English

\*\* joined 6J from 6B for the spring term

Girls' names are in *italics*

Name	SAT results for 1999 in English, mathematics and science	General level of attainment from teacher assessment (A-C)	General attitude to class work from teacher assessment (A-C)	Relations with other pupils from teacher assessment (A-C)
<b>6J</b>				
Josh	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Patrick	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sanjay	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sherwin.	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Bernard**	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Jonathan	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Conway	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Felix	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Reece	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sinclair	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Derek	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Harvey	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Murdoch	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Calvin	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Timothy	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

<i>Fern</i>	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Julia</i>	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Diana</i>	16*	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Louise</i>	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Claire</i>	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Sakhi</i>	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>6B</b>				
Scott	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Adam	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Paddy	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
George	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rex	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Daman	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Nathan	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Nicholas	12	na	n.a.	n.a.
Callum	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Bradley	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Malik	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Travis	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Ahmed	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Daniel	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Claudia</i>	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Colette</i>	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Ingrid</i>	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Kamana</i>	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Shereen</i>	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Total average aggregate score – 13.9

Average boys aggregate score – 13.8

Average girls aggregate score – 13.9

## 7.2 Pupil profiles at Petersfield: SAT scores and teacher assessments

KEY: n.a. means information not applicable or information not available

\* joined the class during the spring term

\*\* did not take mathematics

Girls' names in *italics*

Name	SAT results for 1999 in English, mathematics and science	General level of attainment from teacher assessment (A-C)	General attitude to class work from teacher assessment (A-C)	Relations with other pupils from teacher assessment (A-C)
Mark	14	B	A	A
Vinny	13	B	A	A
Matthew	14	B	A	A
William	13	B	B	B
CT	11	C	C	A
Fred	12	B	A	B
Richard	14	A	A	A
Jinesh	14	A	B	B
Jameil	10	C	B	C
Tom	14	B	B	A
Benjamin.	12	B	A	A
Hussein*	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rod	9	C	B	C
Bobby	11	B	B	B
Gavin	11	B	B	A

Andre	12	B	A	B
Denis	12	B	A	B
<i>Katie</i>	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Hannah</i>	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Lizzie</i>	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Fiona</i>	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Candy</i>	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Lara</i>	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Deborah</i>	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Anika</i>	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Julia</i>	14	n.a.	na.a	n.a.
<i>Frances</i>	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Priscilla</i>	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Patty</i>	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Seema</i>	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Rana</i>	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Mary</i>	6**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Divia</i>	10	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Nadine**</i>	Absent	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Semira</i>	9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Total average aggregate score - 11.8 +

Average boys aggregate score – 12.2

Average girls aggregate score – 11.3

+ Include those pupils who were absent or did not take every test paper.

### A. 7.3 Pupil profiles at Westmoor Abbey; SAT scores and teacher assessments

KEY: \* pupil joined the class during the spring term

\*\* SEN pupil who did not take SAT with rest of class

\*\*\* did not take English

Girls' names in *italics*

Name	SAT results for 1999 in English, mathematics and science	General level of attainment from teacher assessment (A-C)	General attitude to class work from teacher assessment (A-C)	Relations with other pupils from teacher assessment (A-C)
Dan	11	B	B	B
Luke	12	B	B	B
Jack	11	B	B	C
Chris	11	B	B	B
Jimmy	10	C	C	A
Robert	12	A	B	B
Ryan	12	A	A	A
Eric	9	C	B	A
Tom	12	B	A	A
Simon	**	C	A	B
Sam	**	C	A	B
*Emlyn	15	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

<i>Clara</i>	11	B	B	B
<i>Tammy</i>	10	B	B	A
<i>Martha</i>	9	B	A	A
<i>Shannon</i>	10	C	B	B
<i>Leah</i>	11	B	A	A
<i>Debbie</i>	12	A	A	A
<i>Jessie</i>	Absent	B	B	A
<i>Dawn</i>	12	A	A	A
<i>Georgia</i>	10	B	A	B
<i>Billie</i>	12	A	A	A
<i>Amber</i>	11	B	A	A
<i>Angela</i>	5***	B	B	A
<i>*Cosina</i>	**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Total average aggregate score - 9.6 +

Average boys aggregate score – 8.7

Average girls aggregate score – 9.2

+ Includes those pupils who were absent or did not take every test paper.



*A. 7.4 Total SAT scores across all three schools for 1999*

school	<b>HIGHWOODS</b>	<b>PETERSFIELD</b>	<b>WESTMOOR ABBEY</b>
Average boys aggregate score	13.8	12.2	9.6
Average girls aggregate score	13.9	11.3	8.7
Total average aggregate score	13.9 +	11.8*	9.2*

+ Includes absentees and those did not take every test paper; figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest 0.1

## Appendix 8: Pupil ambitions or preferred career at each school

### A.8.1 Highwoods

<b>6J</b>	
Josh	A writer, or work with computers
Patrick	Lawyer or accountant
Sanjay	Work with computers
Sherwin.	Barrister
Bernard**	Rugby player
Jonathan	Tennis player
Conway	Formula 1 racing driver or lawyer
Felix	Cricketer or accountant
Reece	Financier
Sinclair	Footballer or vet
Derek	[Did not ask]
Harvey	Footballer or cricketer
Murdoch	Voice over for The Simpsons
Calvin	Footballer or lawyer
Timothy	Theatre designer or lighting engineer
<b>6B</b>	
Scott	Footballer
Adam	Lawyer, film director or rugby player
Paddy	Artist
George	Chef
Rex	Snooker player
Daman	Fighter pilot
Nathan	Vet
Nicholas	Vet
Callum	Basketball player
Bradley	[Did not ask]
Malik	[Did not ask]
Travis	[Did not ask]
Ahmed	[Did not ask]
Daniel	[Did not ask]

**A.8.2 Petersfield**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ambition or preferred career</b>
Mark	[Unsure]
Vinny	Policeman
Matthew	Rapper singer
William	Businessman
CT	Undercover detective
Fred	Lawyer
Richard	Vet
Jinesh	Royal Marines
Jameil	Footballer
Tom	Footballer
Benjamin.	Space scientist
Hussein*	Stock exchange
Rod	Checkout at supermarket
Bobby	Motor-racing cyclist
Gavin	With computers
Andre	Car mechanic
Denis	[Did not ask]

## A.8.3 Westmoor Abbey

Name	Ambition or preferred career
Dan	Work connected with sports/athletics
Luke	An athlete or work connected with sports/athletics
Jack	Work connected with sports/athletics
Chris	Fireman
Jimmy	Policeman
Robert	Formula 1 racing driver
Ryan	Working with animals (a safari ranger)
Eric	Footballer
Tom	[Not sure]
Simon	Policeman
Sam	Chef
*Emlyn	Scientist

### A.8.4 A Summary of boys' expectations of future jobs/careers at each school

Questions asked in Autumn term, 1998.

Some responses included more than one choice and these have been included. This was particularly prevalent at Highwoods where many boys included an alternative occupation to their first choice of, say professional footballer.

Type of career/profession	Highwoods	Petersfield	Westmoor Abbey
<i>Top professional</i> , e.g. lawyer, accountant, financier, vet	12	4	0
<i>Middle ranking/ Professional</i> , e.g. writer, policeman, fireman, working with computers, theatre-designer, architect, chef, fighter pilot, businessman	8	6	6
<i>Sporting reference</i> , e. g. footballer, but also including working with sports	12	3	5
<i>Manual work/low grade</i> , e.g. car mechanic, checkout in supermarket	0	2	0
<i>Fantasy</i> , e.g. 'voice over for 'The Simpsons'	1	0	0

### **Appendix 9: The gender of maths sets at Petersfield,**

For instance, the three Maths sets at Petersfield were as follows

In set A there were 5 boys, 7 girls

In set B there were 6 boys and 3 girls

In set C there were 5 boys and 8 girls

I do not have the figures for the Maths sets at Westmoor Abbey

At Highwoods, skewed selection procedures towards the girls make any comparisons difficult.

